

THUS I LIVE

Sri

V. G. DESHMUKH.

All rights reserved with the Author.

PERIOD OF WAITING

10th JANUARY 1944

TO

10th FEBRUARY 1944.

on -

*Dedicated to my father, a very
uncommon child of a
very common father.*

PREFACE

—:o:—

WHEN I finished this book, I was reminded of a joke.

The bubbling, buoyant, bursting son told his father that he had got married at which the old-timer replied in a tone full of consolation, "Never mind sonny, we all make mistakes ! "

When I wrote the last line, I said to myself, "I have written a book" and from somewhere within me did surreptitiously steal out the words, "Never mind ! We all make mistakes ! "

Kamala Sadan, 99
Shivaji Park
Dadar Bombay, 14.
Dasera 27th September, 1944.

} Vasant G. Deshmukh.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to professor M. B. Chitnis,
of Khalsa college and Bapu Kelkar,
for their valueable co-operation.

Sixteen year youngster, Bal
Thackeray, has made a fine job of
cartoons and the picture on the
cover-jacket and I thank and congra-
tulate him.

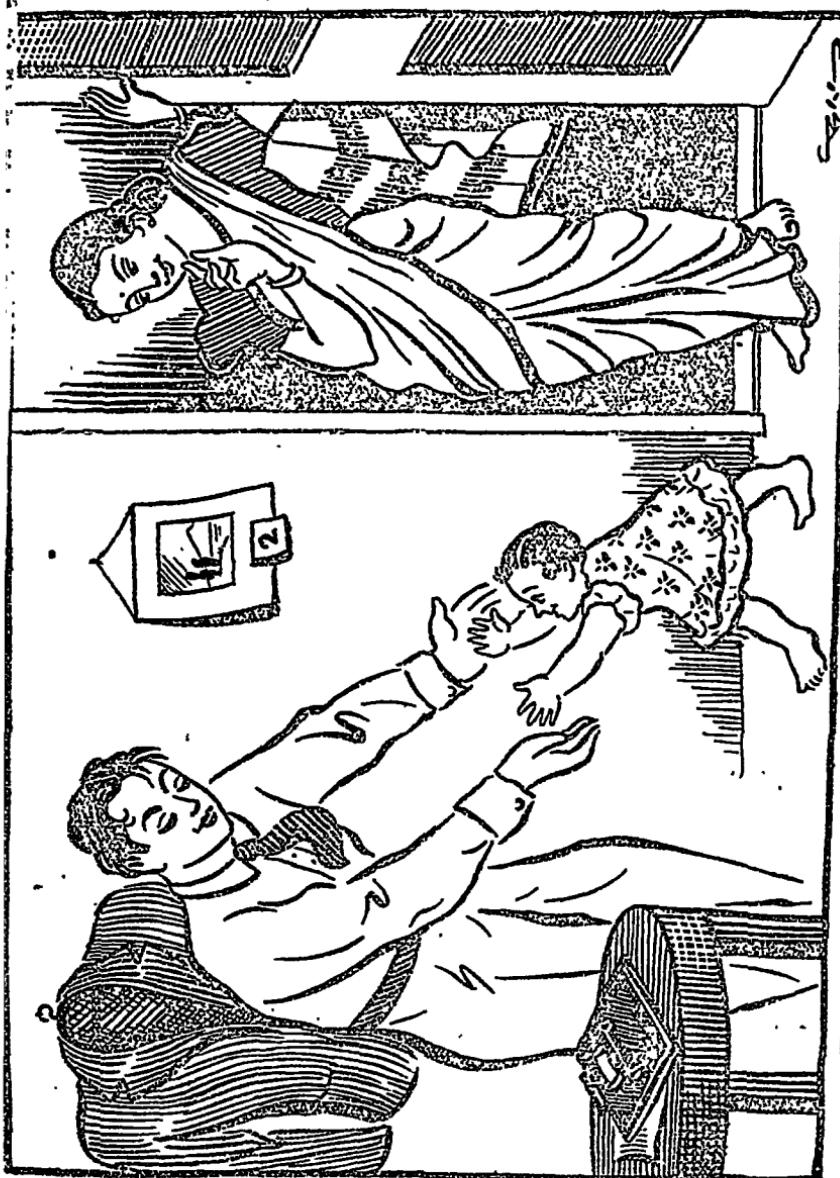
And lastly, I take my hat off in
deference to the printer's Devil, whose
follies I have not enumerated in a list,
but to save paper !

INDEX

	PAGE
NO FEARS	1
MY HUMBLE SELF	2
THE PEOPLE I LIKE	4
MY LAZINESS	7
THE PEOPLE I DISLIKE	9
MY FRIENDS	13
MY VIEW OF LIFE	16
TAKE LIFE EASY	25
DON'T WORRY	29
FATE	32
MATRIMONY	37
ITS UPSHOTS	42
ACCOMMODATION	47
PARENTS	52
BROTHERS	59
MORE ABOUT BROTHERS	64
SISTERS	67
THOSE GRAND MOTHERS-IN-LAW !	74
THE RELATIVES	76
THE JOINT FAMILY	81
MY DRESS	84
MY EXPECTATIONS	89
LIFE, FIGHT IT THROUGH !	93
FIGHT LIFE LAZILY	98
THE MISFITS IN LIFE	103
MISFITS GLORIFY LIFE	108
THE CREAM OF LIFE	112
ENJOYMENT	118

	PAGE
29 HOW MUCH WORK, SIR ?	124
30 I WOULD SLEEP NOW	129
31 YES ! THAT'S ENOUGH	136
32 I FEEL TIRED	142
33 WAKE UP ! YOU FOOL !	147
34 ENERGETIC ANTS	152
35 THE VIOLIN OF LIFE	158
36 WE DO PERISH	163
37 CRAWLING WORMS	168
38 HAPPINESS THROUGH NON-ENTITY !	173
39 MY LEISURE	178
40 MY ILLUSIONS	184
41 OUR FILMS	189
42 THE TEETOTALLER	200
43 THE KIDDIES	205
44 THE FAIR-SEX	209
45 KNOW THEM ALL	215
46 THIS CLOSING DRAMA	220
47 LAST VISIONS	225
48 THE CURTAIN RINGS DOWN !	231

Illustrations on pages 6, 17, 93, 106 and 125.



THUS I LIVE

1

NO FEARS.....

IN this attempt, should anybody apprehend something heavy and weighty, I would only say that his apprehension would be misplaced. This is a personal testimony of my failures and faults, my defects and flaws, my follies and falls. As an ordinary individual, as a man in the street, as a common man, I can always take refuge underneath the deep-dug trench of mediocrity, should any crack critic bombard me with heavy shells of criticism. I like critics, in fact. They are intelligent creatures and as they take such a deep interest in the works of the writers as a class, I would only say in fairness, that rarely is pure intelligence harnessed to a more undesirable pursuit. As for me, should any critic waste his time over this waste of ideas and deceit, he is personally responsible for spoiling his good time after such a friendly caution has been sounded.

Frankly speaking, I have made such a serious blunder in selecting the title that when I now consider the full implications of the same, I shudder.

I shudder because I honestly doubt my capacity to fulfil the expectations the title may raise in many a lured mind.

Having given a frank account of my capacities that distinctly err on the debit side, I now hope to start out with my incoherent apology. I am hopeful that the reader may form some coherent ideas at the end of this ordeal and if that is achieved, I shall have scored no small victory.

I am sure that most of the readers of these lines are just as common men as the sinner of the book is and this fact is giving me such an immense relief and consolation that I am persevering in this apparently intellectual trespass, as I feel strongly protected by the sheer love—the sheer fraternal love of the masses and its limitless forbearance..

* *
*

2

MY HUMBLE SELF

I am only a couple of inches short of six feet. To a normally impoverished and half-fed average Indian, it is a matter worth being proud about. I look also almost hefty as I am fairly broad. That is something almost rare. We Indians, as a rule are stunted. Those who are tall are thin and those who are broad are mostly not tall.

In other words, the tall and the broad type is unfortunately rare in this country and I am happy that I belong to this coveded category. By the way, I am beginning with my physique as after all, physique is so very important-atleast I-consider it so. The cage of the soul must be strong and durable, or else the "bird" may simply flap off leaving the cage alone. To come again to my breadth, therefore, I repeat that I am sufficiently broad to be termed as healthy and also sufficiently thin to be termed as lanky.

The face is the map of the heart of man - or nearly always a good outline of it. It would be womanly to write about one's face and I would only say that my face is such that children are not afraid of me. Personally I think that this is a good index to a man's repulsing or attracting capacity. Children instinctively like or dislike men, even women, and I have found that they spot out exactly harsh looking types for their repugnance. I flatter myself, therefore, that kiddies like me and though it may seem that I may have invented this theory, to suit my personal convénience, yet I will not refute such an allegation.

I am physically strong. I would like to have muscles on my body but I am lazy énough not to develop them by some sort of regular exercise. I hate exercise but deeply wish that others should take it. It is so beneficial in the long run you

THUS I LIVE

know; but I wouldn't do it daily-no! Not for worlds!

I have an interesting photograph of mine that shows me as just a kiddy about ten, plump and broad. I thought and everybody else thought that I would be a dwarf. But then afterwards like a banana tree, I swiftly grew, and thereafter, my physique always beat my intelligence hollow in the race of expansion and has, to this day, maintained the championship!

* *
*

3

THE PEOPLE I LIKE

MAN, as he happens, is not an unsocial fool, and as he is not an unsocial fool, everybody tries to mingle with everybody else's affairs, private and otherwise and thus we get the essential material for maintaining a gullible society, artificial friendships, social contacts that are attempts to be amiable and the desire to "enjoy life" which is partially fulfilled. The most destructive organ of man, I presume, is the tongue which not only eats and relishes as efficiently as the stud bull's does, but also *talks* and we know what *talk* has done to our world. I think Nature has been too impartial in the distribution of essential organs to us and she certainly should have discriminated

while bestowing such a powerful weapon as a tongue upon all human beings, including fools and half-baked politicians. The people I like, have a tongue that almost uniformly talks the language that I talk or which I would like to talk but which they often do as they beat me completely in academic intelligence.

I have not seen much of the world but of what little I have seen, I can say that the world is after all a place of hypocrites and for hypocrites. The straightforward gentleman will, because of his nature, suffer such serious reverses that only a few years of "practical life" will see him twisted out of shape. The plain-speaking man will perish as he has the moral courage to utter the plain truth. The truth holds good but the speaker is hunted down for committing the serious and unpardonable sin of uttering the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth !

I like all generous men because I am so. I like all unpractical fools because then I would not only rival them but also would probably beat many of them on that score. I like those who talk a lot and let me talk a lot too. I like those who eat a lot because in their company I wouldn't be ranked as a glutton and therefore the process of my abdominal gratification would go as smoothly as I would wish it to go. My point is, those who consume a good quantity of food would allow others to reciprocate to an equal degree and here

THUS I LIVE

is the correct type that lives and would let others live. You see after all, it will be difficult for a normal human being to find fault with the world around if his tummy is full of sweet juices and spicy food and the result would, in all probability, be that he would involuntarily drown what little complain or worry he has in the snoring of a deep slumber after his heavy meal. Well, I would like that man. He may look a selfish, self-centred person without a broader vision or outlook and without any regard to the hungry and wretched but I repeat that it is difficult to remember unpleasant things when one is feeling pleasant and almost happy. The martyrs that mankind has produced must have been either a disappointed, disgruntled, peevish lot or quite a celestial one. But I don't imagine them to be just as normal as I am or as my snoring friend is.

I like fat people. I have again a theory for them too. I think that fat men generally are an agreeable, good-hearted kind. There is, I presume, a reason for their being so. We know all too well that they have less mobility of limbs or they develop less mobility of limbs than other persons and naturally, therefore, they cultivate a knack for getting their work done by somebody else. This requires a sweet tongue and kindly manners and in the imperceptible process of accumulating the fat, the fat man imperceptibly accumulates a sweet tongue, kindly manners and a persuasive tone.

Thus, to me it seems that the good nature of fat men is a matter of personal and physical convenience. Taking this for granted, I still like those rolling "flesh balls" because it is better to withstand artificial amiability than genuine coarseness. I must make a mention of that rare type that is highly aesthetic. They are usually unfortunate and ill-placed in life. As an emotional paradox, their uncomfortable placing within the framework of a giant structure of the world accentuates their aesthetic faculties and what little they gather of real happiness while plodding on their painful march, is the happiness that neither riches nor power can buy. My circle, in fact, consists of those iconoclasts, those disillusioned lotus-eaters, those unlucky underdogs, that relish the bone of life that is practically shorn of the flesh of financial prosperity. I devour the bone too !

* * *

4

MY LAZINESS

TO eulogise a personal vice is the height of egotism, but as this particular vice plays not an unimportant part in giving me the deserving retaliation, I would like to give the devil his due.

You see, we all are very clever when it comes to passing the blame on somebody else. I do it as adroitly as anybody else would and justify my

THUS I LIVE

laziness by putting the blame on the "weather". If it is summer I would console myself by saying "Yes! Yes! Who would work now but a fool? The Sun is burning down, the wind is dead, and even the leaves refuse to move; why should I then?" If it is rainy season, I would immediately say "My God : what a rain? What a pour? just can't go out". If it is winter, I would wrap myself up in all the warm clothes available and speaking carefully, as if fearing the freezing of the words in transit, just mutter "Awfully cold, shall die if I stir out." So you see throughout the year, I work just enough to earn a living and that too with great reluctance! I simply marvel at those industrious species, who keep busy like the ants all the year round and though I would like to possess their arts and crafts, I am not prepared to pay the exorbitant price of energy and perseverance that such pursuits would demand. The result is obvious. I am left a mere nothing. I often get an intense desire to do something, to learn something and sometimes the urge is so consuming that I actually shake off my lethargy and stir myself up. This unnatural activity unfortunately does not hold out long enough even to overcome the initial difficulties of learning and my mind then dives into the subconscious world to fathom out a convenient excuse for abandoning the pastime or art or whatever it is! Thus you see the person I am, with a keen

curiosity about all the fine arts and attempting occassionally to tread on their solemn grounds with the impetuosity of an erring child, the rashness of an idealist adult, the inertia of the maturer age and the follies of all these ages put together. No wonder then that I have learnt to carve out happiness out of my inactive propensities and to be frank, this work is an outcome of my indolence inasmuch as writing pre-requires a steady position. For the pleasure of sitting at home, if not for anything else, have I compiled this jumble of words.

* *
*

5

THE PEOPLE I DISLIKE

THE people I dislike or would like to dislike have a moral right to pay me back in the same coin and to tell the truth I do not dislike individuals so much as I detest some particular categories. Every individual is so very individual in his talk, his manners, his demeanour that he is, to all intents and purpose, an independent human entity, functioning independently. His actions and reactions are apparently personal and the demarcating line of personal and impersonal matters of the common man is so very faint indeed that it is difficult to perceive it. Thus the collective actions and reactions of the mass produce the

normal throb of a routine life and it is here that we keep the sound beats correctly. Our mechanical livelihood involuntarily maintains the dull song of an eventless passing life and it is here that I feel the utter frustration of my person as a whole. To presuppose that one belongs to a category entirely different from the rest, is I fear, a case of over-estimation. I cannot, however, persuade myself to accept that view. Somehow or other I feel utterly convinced that there are finer rudiments in some obscure corner of my heart that are capable of whistling out a melodious song and my struggle persists in searching the key to that coveted note I hope to reproduce.

- The people I dislike would be the people who are incapable of appreciating such a sonorous whistle born out of life itself or worst still, the cynical intellectual who would ridicule it with his dry and pungent sarcasm. I can understand those who cannot imagine such a thing as harmony of life, and who are blissfully ignorant of such emotional complications. But those that deride the Life so glorious, simply for the gratification of their cynical instincts are a human species whose heartbeats do not keep pace with mine. I dislike them instinctively as a class.

I would even prefer the cynical intellectual to that money-making, heartless tribe that eats off the cream of society, develops a financial fat and

dies in the end of the diabetes of unfulfilled desires. Here is the type of individual with whom I cannot, in any stage of my life, see eye to eye and he wouldn't, I am sure, be able to do the same with mine. He will be devoid absolutely of all aesthetic sense, regardless of all that is beautiful and sublime in Nature. The glory of art shall be lost upon him and he would view any artistic production, with his measured practical eye as an idle waste of time. He would count everything in silver, even his soul. For, he would say that after his death he would be worth so much or that his son will have so much legacy to squander. Nothing would please him better than to peer into his bank-book balance again and again and no occupation would be more pleasant than that of opening and shutting his safe hundred times a day with everything of the eyes that could be fixed upon it in that process. He would own some houses, collect a good rent, keep his tenants permanently displeased and would thrive on the adversity of many of them. He would always gloat over Banks, Share-certificates, Dividends, Bonus, Insurance Policies, Postal Cash Certificates, rent, gold and silver and all short cuts to fortune imaginable. Excuse me, reader, but I can't be even a good companion of them, leave aside being a real friend. I have an abhorrence for this type because I do not see visions of wealth as they do and though I would be called an utopian fool for this denunciation, I wouldn't mind it.

The business world, the practical world does require them and in fact respect them but they, cannot, on the strength of their bank balance, claim a morsel of respect from me.

To come to individuals, I would only say that I am simply incapable of hating anybody, heart and soul. After all, there is always something in the man we try to hate, that is worth appreciating. I would always try my best to exploit the good point of such an individual to eradicate the hatred and replenish the vacuum thus created with the milk of kindness and good humour and thus win him over. Personally I believe that if we are able to effect such a sentimental conversion, it will be a great and resounding victory over the evils within us and such a spiritual uplift of ourselves will be our celestial emancipation. This is indeed a difficult task and is much more difficult to act upon than it is to write. With all the good will in my heart, I have sometimes been unsuccessful in this testing experiment Every such failure emphasizes the evil within me. Of course, it is altogether futile to waste our sweet reasonableness on that bitter and perverted lot whose sole mission in life seems to be to create trouble, quarrels, disharmony, discord and strife wherever they happen to plant their cantankerous selves.



6

MY FRIENDS

FORTUNATELY I have very few friends. I use the word 'fortunately' quite deliberately. I would, on no account, like a host of friends. My personal opinion is that a man should have at the most three or four friends. Any larger number would, in my opinion, vivisect the individual personality as quite unconsciously, we mould ourselves instinctively to suit the temperament of the friend, actually then in contact. As against this, a group of four friends or so, appears to be a homogeneous fraternal entity and would, as years roll on, be carved out into a concrete structure that sunshine and storm shall not affect and cracks of misunderstanding wouldn't demolish.

A good friend is an asset in life. His guiding influence is an 'eternal consolation. The love of a real friend has a peculiar flavour of warmness because it is unstinted by family relations. He is, in fact, the outsider, who takes such a domestic and homely interest in all our affairs, pleasant or otherwise and becomes a sort of sanctuary as he enjoys the privilege of influencing ourselves without actually being in our midst—that is, without actually being in our family.

The wheels of chance play a predominant part in rendering us our friends. Friends, like

that precious little number of lotus-eaters. They would be my friends. There is no doubt about that. With so much within a soul, I will be surprised indeed if its possessor is not generous to a fault—and I like persons who are generous and those better, who are generous to a fault. My few friends conform to this description. There are one or two more vital qualities. Complete disregard of wealth and a wonderful mental equipoise that would scoff at worldly setbacks and laugh derisively at every fall and rebuff. This requires a great mastery over mind and though it may look a sort of a boast on my part to credit myself with it, yet I would hazard the statement that I do possess the same to a creditable extent.

I entertain no expectations from my friends—not do they. We are a normally happy lot eking out a sub-human existence and more than anything else, it is our sense of humour and our convenient philosophy and theories that is keeping our necks stiff. Our view of life is also so very conveniently refreshing that by any stretch of imagination we cannot picture ourselves as miserable and wretched. The secret lies in our joint pact to extract happiness with the skill of a connoisseur in that line and that is that. The result is, our company occupies so much of our time that we happily forget the things we are without and which we so badly require, good salaries for example. This apparent prerequisite of "happiness" doesn't worry us at all. We have

found substitutes for silver and gold which no amount of riches can ever buy. Thus does life ebb and flow, to the rhythm of our whispered, secluded talk and though riches and glamour, flats and cafes, cars and servants miss us all, still our hearts and heads conjure up a perennial vision of a sweet tempered happy lot, clustered up together in somebody's humble apartments, wearing out the starry night with tales of our follies and those of others, and imbibing just a cup of tea with as much relish as if it were crimson sparkling champagne in cute and shy glasses!

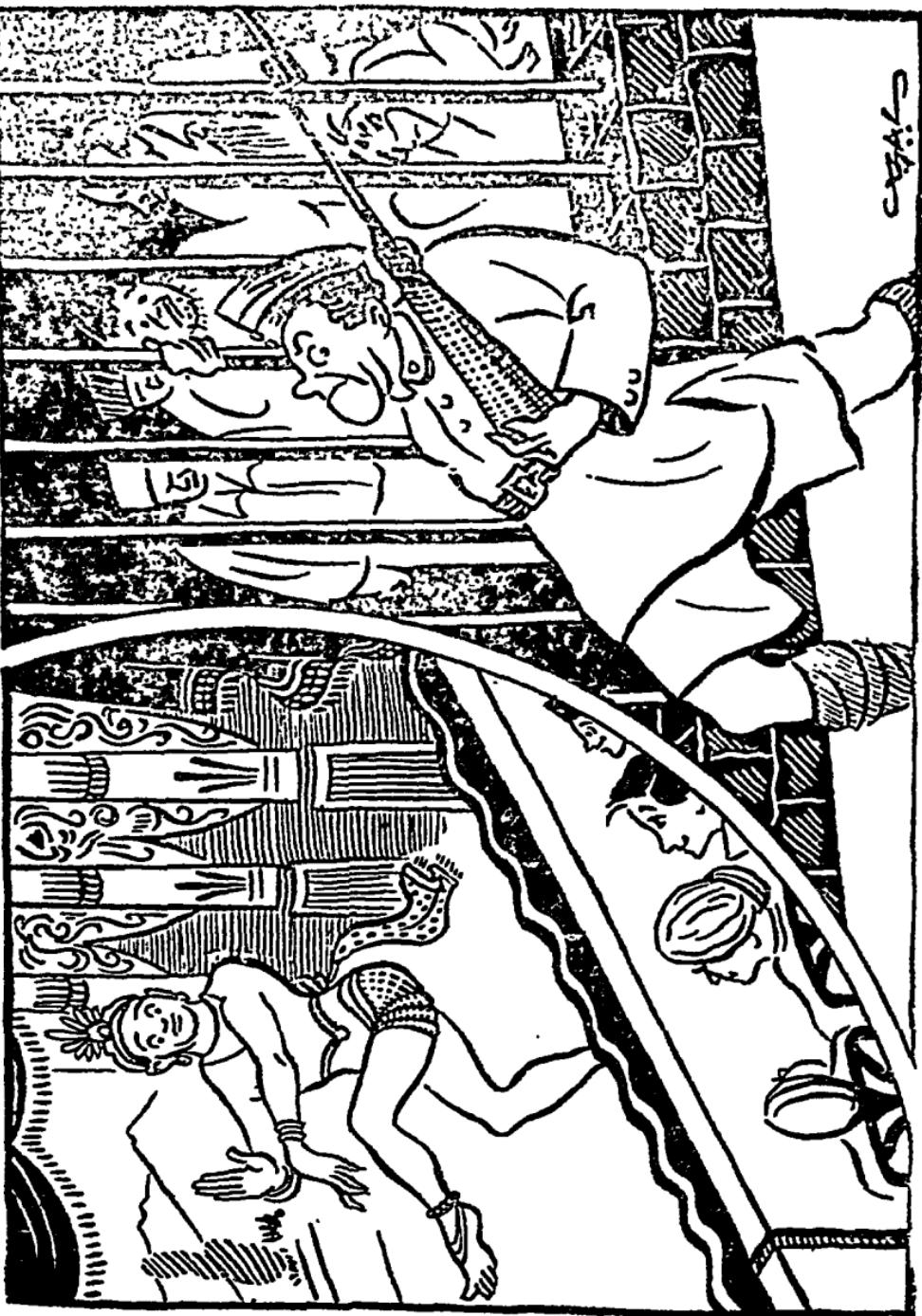
* *
*

7

MY VIEW OF LIFE.

I have begun my life with a sort of assumption that I have to live it through, whether I like it or not. It is no use complaining against the sea, for example. So also it is no use complaining about life as well. Therefore my orphan assumption in the beginning helps me a great deal in tolerating many a thing that would otherwise have become simply intolerable. I derive satisfaction also from the fact that Nature has been very impartial in her organic distribution to mankind and that all the physical rules, viz. that of childhood, youth and old age are rigidly enforced. As such, I say

ست



that my defects are common defects and my failures, common failures. This is true as far as there are common factors—and more important, as long as it touches the physical aspect of the matter. The real trouble arises out of the serious discrepancy in the gamut of individual intelligence and it is here that the full complexity of life asserts itself. Our workshop in the top-floor is the deciding factor in this worldly struggle and though it decays down to a sheer waste after a given period of service, still during its live period, it practically controls the destiny of the owner. I have a brain that has one very good quality; that of forgetfulness. I am also happy to mention that this forgetfulness is confined to petty matters, and still better to matters vitally connected with the practical world. This is an asset from my point of view and as the natural process of simply forgetting such matters has now formed itself into a habit, it has substantially helped my personal philosophy. Complete disregard for trivialities and wealth has given me a precious escape from this work-a-day-world-life and I have been to some extent in the enviable position of observing a detached view of life from the distant hill-top of a care-free nature. My point is, as a man learns to sever himself to a reasonable extent from this worldly life at least for a few moments in a day, he develops in his person, an adamant personality that nothing material can ever hypnotize. . . I am

making attempts in that direction and hope to be successful some time in my life. Such a mental state will shear a man from jealousy and malice and that is something really great. Nearly half our worries arise out of the prosperity of our colleagues and our contemporaries. I would be grossly wrong if this is not so. Even great men have not been quite free from the clutches of jealousy, malice and avarice. If, therefore, one develops an attitude that would be incapable of being stunned, then that man, in all probability, is likely to be happier than many others.

Life is a combustible substance. I do my best therefore to bask in its feeble light whenever I possibly can. I say whenever because one third of one's life is a matter of closed eye-lids, wishful dreams and terrifying hallucinations. One third is an affair that we call the struggle for existence. The remaining one third has two divisions. The first one has to be earmarked for essential and routine duties. The second division is most important. This is the period that evolves the life of a man and leads him to bare mediocrity, alluring limelight or bitter poverty. The three odd hours that one may get decide whether a man is an intelligent creature or a two-legged animal. I am not quite sure as to which category I exactly belong but I am trying without taking undue strain, as usual, to belong to the former.

None need presume that I am a pessimist. As

a matter of fact, I am an indomitable optimist and with every rebuff I get, I become more ferocious and attack more savagely as the tiger does. Failures and nothing else have smashed up my lethargy and though I have not achieved any public success, still I have scored many a personal victory that are a deep solace.

Twisting one's personality, even out of shape if so required is, I think, the greatest asset that a common man like me can hope to achieve and I have acquired some amount of elasticity, thanks to the roughness with which life treated me on some occasions. If this mental elasticity or better still, adaptability is acquired, life will hold no terror for such a man. The vicissitudes of life are many and varied, the kicks of fortune are indeed resounding but such a person shall be more than a match for both the life and fortune put together. I have imagined myself in the worst situations and the conditions of life that I may have to sustain and thereafter have I thought over as to how I would react then and how I would be still a normally happy fellow. After mature consideration, to my surprise I found, that any condition that I would be thrown into wouldn't after all be so disagreeable as it appears to be. Maybe I am wrong. It may be my indomitable optimism, that produces such convenient assumptions. Or the actual reality may be altogether a different proposition—a stiff and bitter proposition that my imagination cannot visualize. All this is possible.

But still I venture to maintain that no stage of life is quite unbearable, or utterly hopeless and would drive one to commit suicide. The rich fellow can smile stupidly all the year round. That is all right. The unknown hero, the common man is, armed with only normal inklings of capacity is the hero that dies unwept and unsung and to him I give my respects. He is hurled up and down either in the oceans of offices or else in the seven turbulent seas of commercial fluctuations and the unstable element that life has become cannot offer anything as reward to him, but sorrow, pain, tears and disease. To be normally happy has become such a difficult task because we have made our lives too complicated. This civilization has brought with it a destructive commercialism and this commercialism has blasted out the sweeter roots of life, root and branch. The forces of the modern world are so terrific that one spins round and round like a top in its typhoon and by the time one comes to rest or retire, life passes away and there's an end of the matter. We common folk, therefore, have to be stable while we are actually unstable, and this battle between the physical existence and the spiritual emancipation is such a gruelling and marvellous episode, that the grand climax of life reaches its pinnacle here. The life of the masses having become straight like the rails, and commercialism having corroded its finer

framework within, the whole picture as it is rendered to us to-day is a multitude of humanity, knocking each other down, and smashing each other through. Thus in a world, where competition and efficiency are the watchwords, leisure and sentimental finery cannot naturally obtain even a living space and those with higher mental powers have to sacrifice it at the altar of a paltry salary that the big boss at the top offers. Here I am referring to the lower-middle class intellectuals and to myself in general. I may not be an intellectual but I certainly belong to the lower middle-class and naturally my sympathies run deep for this section of the public. Speaking about them generally, means speaking about myself as well.

The lower-middle class harbours the inglorious privilege of securing a clerical vocation and many a gentleman belonging to this class is a personification of a perpetual intellectual paradox. He would be fairly well educated, fairly well-read and with a fairly good knowledge of the world around along with a sinister understanding of the vicious circle in which he is destined to rotate. As a clerk or a typist his financial leap is very poor, his rate of promotion is miserable and at the end of his struggle the picture of the last grads is nearly always far from rosy. He has a keen desire to plunge in "business" without the dash of a businessman and would conjure up many a side-line that he wouldn't

pursue. A glimpse in the literary world has polished his ideas a bit and the practical world being too rough to allow of such nonsense, he is a little embarrassed. He is capable of slight parasitic brooding and this, on occasions, accentuates his depression, gives him wanton despondency and impresses upon him all the more strongly his utter helplessness as an independent individual, itching to make a mark somewhere. Thus, a large disheartened populace looks on expectantly at life with tears in the eyes and grumblings on the lips. I once belonged to that crowd. I have pulled myself sufficiently away to laugh at life itself and mock it from a distance far. This deliverance has not been without failures and it is no miracle that I have succeeded to a certain extent in detaching myself away from just commonplace thraldom. This I have achieved without leaving my basic seat as a commoner. I don't consider myself overwise or gifted. I am only learning to understand things. That's all. The greater the degree of reasonableness within me the greater shall I relish the syrup of life. To be reasonable implies some sort of sacrifice, and in this one sided transaction, the other party invariably stands to gain. To attempt to propagate such a mentality would appear to be a futile attempt to reverse the mental tide of the modern man who is apt to have little scruples, moral or otherwise for gaining even a paltry, insignificant gain. Another capacity that

helps me a lot is the capacity to forget quarrels, however violent. Really, I have no memory for quarrels at all. Not that I lack in self-respect. Far from that.

My point is, as soon as I see a person I know; my lips part involuntarily, the uneven teeth flash out a childish smile, the right or the left hand lifts itself up to wish him and there's an end of the rub. The triumphs of a man are numerous in themselves; but to have no enemy in the world at all is a good and great thing. As for me, if there happens to arise even the slightest misunderstanding, I snatch the first opportunity to clear it clean. After all, our stay here is so limited that if we spoil this good drama by playing the villain in it, it will certainly be to our discredit. The world has villains enough already, and does not look upto us for contribution in that capacity. What the world has been looking upto these days, and looking piteously, is for good, serene, aesthetes that would glorify life by their artistic existence. I would like to add my own quota thereto. Life may not be too much with us and we may not have the time to stand and stare but we must master our lives to the extent of convincing ourselves that life may not be too little with us but it is certainly not too much and that we may not find time to stand and stare; but we will certainly manage to have a fleeting glance at all the deser-

ving objects with the sharpness of a young maid's eye, and catch with it all that is worth catching.

Thus I live. I slyly smile at life and life laughs at me. Seasons come and seasons go. I become maturer in age. Oft in despondency I compare myself to the fellow just below me, I mean whom my mind places just below me as the subject for my convenient comparison and after comparing myself with him, I consider myself happy and contented. I don't consider anybody low. No ! Not that. The idea is, it is just a personal barometer for measuring and deriving happiness from. Somebody else might be making me the barometer. The sole idea is to suck out as much happiness as one conveniently can. This idea of comparison may not be cherished by some. I find nothing harmful in it. After all, we measure ourselves secretly, and the secrecy gives great joy.

Life, therefore, is not so very an unpleasant affair after all and should our placing in this world be quite undesirable then we must do our level best to exploit the undesirable situation in furthering our chief aim of creating the charm, the rhythm and happiness in life.

8

TAKE LIFE EASY

"TAKE it easy, boy", I say to myself when things go all wrong around me. Is it not true that there are limits to personal set-backs? Is it not a fact that failures alone cannot keep a consistent triumph over us? The tide must sometime turn in our favour. Armed with such reflections, I withstand the lashes of misfortune. Every successive defeat whets my dagger of determination and I know for certain then that a day would dawn when I would be more ruthless to misfortune than ever it had been to me. This desire for revenge does not ferment in my mind so aggressively as to disturb my mental equipoise nor so densely as to befog my objective. Thus the idea of taking life easy is really never obliterated and thrives secretly in a paradoxical bosom. Fate has, on many occasions, collared me in the rough fashion of a drunken sailor, so roughly indeed that when my memory plays back to those tragic and heart-rending days, I am amazed at myself. I am amazed all the more because then I had fought the battle single-handed, against a determined and well armed foe as it were, and I did it with a smiling face, though the face was darkened by poverty and bruised by a terrific onslaught of a succession of disasters that

would have crushed the heart of a sentimental person. But I took life easy and such a thorough training I received in the school of bitter experiences that now I have become immune to the worst attacks conceivable. I honestly believe that if fate handles a man nastily in the early part of his life, particularly in the adolescent stage, then he undergoes a sort of practical apprenticeship, which would render him a man of immense nerve and courage. It would also fire in him a defiant attitude and though he wouldn't be frightened by anything earthly, yet he would react and recoil superbly at the slightest provocation, as his nerves and his temperament will have been beaten down into an elastic, sensitive fabric.

Take life easy. I take it easy too. Somebody might say, "Well! Mr. so and so, it's all right your philosophising wisely, because it doesn't cost anything. What about a person like me, for example, a person unestablished in life, without anything to fall back upon and without any source either of income or of help?" "Well Sir!" I would say, "Take it easy. I was exactly in that unenviable position you just mentioned above. I am not pretending to philosophise. I can't do it, even if I would like to. You say of settling or establishing in life. Who is settled or established? Nobody is. One who thinks that he is settled, doesn't think after some time that he is, and strives and struggles again for richer gains

in some sphere or the other and there again he becomes unsettled. Of course, such a person is assured of daily meals and a humble shelter but his sphere of expectations enlarges after a certain period and there commences his struggle for the betterment of his entire position.

This race with the time and chances and this eternal struggle for the creation of a better home, a fatter bank balance and the radiat glow of a commanding position occupies the youthful dilations and eats up the bubbling buoyancy of the slashing hero and this is the career-carving, adventurous, dynamic type that has glorified the world with his electric life. So you see, none is stable and so very settled as you imagine. As for your difficulty that you have nothing to fall back upon, or that you have sources, neither of income nor of help, let me tell you that yours is not the singular instance to fall under this category. There are thousands of this type and in fact, I was one of them. I had not only nothing to look upto but also that I had a legacy of debts when I started out alone to seek my fortune in this world. I had neither a good education nor the advantages of an academic career and I strutted alone in a world wherein educated persons are produeed in mass. My relations were as poor as I was and are still as poor as I am. I had no rich and fat uncle or a loving, heavenly aunt who would die one fine morning quite suddenly and leave me

by myself to squander a large fortune, all at once. Such a happy incident, I couldn't even imagine. To make matters complicated I was supersensitive and even touchy and had a cantankerous disposition ancillary to habitual quarrelsomeness. The world that I saw then was a world that admitted of a few, bright, educated, up-to-date youths, who talked of coats and trousers and fashions and pictures all through the days. In that world there was no admission for an ill-clad, half-educated, nervous and supersensitive struggler like me. Therefore, I grew quite alarmed at the ways of the world. In all this dark picture, there was a bright glimmer and it was that I had quite a good sense of humour and sarcasm that squeezed out pure mirth, even in the midst of the most tragic situation. This sense of humour and this cynical sarcasm in due course created an indomitable optimism and once I got astride of normal worries, I thought I had half won the battle. My emphasis, that I always try to belittle everything, however disastrous it may be to my personal self, is stressed on this account. Cynical sarcasm and sarcastic cynicism have helped to delineate for me a burlesque picture of life and has made my person within a sort of tremendous buffer against which any train of misfortune can collide without fear of causing disaster. To repeat again, I would say that I am learning to take life easy and we have to take it easy for the simple reason that we cannot afford

to take it in any other strain, and if we do, we do it to our own detriment and at the cost of our happiness."

* *
*

9

DON'T WORRY

IT is quite easy to tell anybody "Don't worry". The first thing I shell out to anybody who comes to me in distress or sorrow is that "Don't worry". This two word magic-band works up miracles. It is the balm that would soothe all aches. I have not taken out a patent for this medicine but I am trying out a mixture for my personal use. The fact is that I am still in the experimental stage and I conjecture it would be a long time to hit upon the correct proportion as it is quite a stiff matter to curb an active, hasty and impulsive mind. "Don't worry" philosophy pre-supposes a series of catastrophic failures and it is when a man loses the sense of being shocked by continual disasters, that he gets to be a wise man—a man of the world.

A few days ago an elderly person knocked at my door at the odd hour of 3 A. M. and asked me whether a doctor could be got immediately to attend on his fast failing wife who had given a magnificent fight with death for three years. I rubbed

the sleep off my eyes as well as I could, composed myself, took in the situation in a couple of seconds and calmly said "Don't worry! She would recover presently". I uttered this almost mechanically and there was on the elderly man's face, a faint twitch of the lips suggestive of assurance and gratitudel. Never have I comforted a harassed man so much as I did at that cold dawn and assuring him all the way down I scrambled for a doctor. By the time the doctor arrived the bird had flown and there he was, out on the road, standing limply under a gas-lamp alone in that biting night to tell us that his life's companion was gone and that he was waiting to save the doctor's trouble of walking, though only by a few yards: The doctor having left, he burst into a hysterical cry and I held him tight against me and whispered in his ears "Well ! Sir! God is great ! Should you lose your balance, what would your children do ? Compose yourself for Heaven's sake ! Don't worry ! Everything will be all right. Don't worry ! "

Everything was not all right. Death was still hovering in that room and I was pleading him not to worry ! Strange as it may seem, my pleading worked. The emaciated, unfortunate husband composed himself and began like a man for the funeral. I am not boasting, but for that "Don't worry" I cannot, for the life of me, imagine when could the fellow have recovered.

Life is a platform and fast trains of successes

and semi-fast trains of fortunes all arrive there in time but we usually miss these trains by just half a minute! The chances that we narrowly miss in life often come so very within our reach that we almost think that we have succeeded in our attempts and foolishly go on dreaming. Then when the setback strikes us full in the face, we lose it and take some time to recover from that shock. Here the "Don't worry" balm will have really a magic effect and I say this from personal experience.

A friend of mine and myself had appeared for an examination. He thought he was too much of a scholar. We wrote the papers and he asked me how I fared. I said "So - So". To my question, he gave a lengthy account as to how nicely he had written each question, how the examiner would be simply stunned and all that. I was amazed at all this. On the day of the results, I was not amazed to see him fail. I patted the loquacious fellow and said "The examiner will be stunned next time in the other sense. All the same, don't worry ! ! ! "

Afterwards it may come to such a stage that the relative senses of a man would be benumbed, and fortune and misfortune would be equally scoffed at. I wouldn't like to develop to this stage. After all, I must not lose my sense of proportion and the intensity of feelings. In that case the propriety of passing an aesthetic existence would

be lost upon me. I would like my sentimental fibres to be paralysed a little above the normal standard, but not to such an abnormal degree as to convert me into an apology of an ascetic. I am a man of the world, real and simple and I have to limit my idealism to allow me to earn a living wage, it not for myself, for my family. There is always the danger of being called a "practical fool" and as generally such compromises of idealism and realism are so numerous, the men around are likely to view persons like me as overwise, stupid fellows who are nothing but pure eccentrics.

But I don't worry. I don't worry what names people call me. I may even be a worry to some of them. But I don't worry.

* *
*

10

FATE

IT is often said that man is the master of his Fate and destiny. Personally, I think, this is true to a certain limit. The efforts of a man have a limited range as, after all, his perseverance and determination are not boundless. With a given amount of these capacities that are latent in a person, he draws on them as often as the occasion demands and when the saturation point is attained

he gives up hope and resigns himself to Fate. It is here that the fatalistic gentleman is born, in the commonplace, uncongenial hospitals of utter frustration. It is here that he comes to understand, and comes to understand thoroughly that there is some such force as Fate in individual life and that everybody's track is, in fact, chalked out with his birth and that as a human being he cannot sufficiently deviate that path in the fashion of a masterman. Superstitious as man is, the fear of some great controlling agency that some call God, others call Fate and still others call Nature, always haunts in the remotest corners of his sub-conscious mind and one or the other idea gets itself ingrained in him, though he wouldn't perhaps like to admit it. The modern hustling gentleman might just nestle with his cheap tie and say haughtily, "Well ! Sir !! You see I am an atheist but I believe in Fate ". His humanitarian contemporary would express his opinion in a more spectacular fashion. He would gaze serenely out of his window which probably overlooks a dismal scene of a jumble of factories and the intermingling spirals of smoke, and combing his hair with his fingers, say in a splintering voice "You see gentleman ! I believe in Nature. Nature is Life and Life is Nature. They are quite inseparable as the light and shade. I don't believe in God. It's all trash ". In fact, he would add "Our ecclesiastical department is a perpetual bane to our humani-

tarian, modern and scientific world". The third type would look at the skies above and gesticulating superbly, say, "Well ! Young boy!! You are but a jumpy colt. I am an old fellow. I had foolish queries as you have now in mind and which you frankly ask. Believe in me when I say that there is a God and it is He who makes you eat and drink and sleep and work. Without Him the world would be a world without the Sun - without light, without knowledge, without life!"

Yes! Yes! All of you are right, my dear good fellows! Just as there are different parties in any form of administration so are there different sects of people who believe in different embodiments of the throb of life. Some call it God, others say Fate and some others cry out Nature. Whatever it is, as it is, it appears to me that whatever we see and live through is a production of these three supernatural requisites that have baffled the mankind from times immemorial.

I am a fatalist myself and I am fatalist only to a reasonable extent. What I mean to stress is, I would try not to lose the sense of proportion while reviewing, say, a succession of events connected with myself. I would also try to pick out, if the results are unpleasant, how much of my folly or inaptitude or inefficiency or circumstances over which I had no control, contributed individually or collectively in helping to happen what has happened. Fate plays no unimportant role in

a man's life. That is true. But I cannot afford to rely on Fate alone. Fate would co-operate with me if I would co-operate with it. If after all my sincere and honest co-operation, Fate doesn't budge an inch and gives me a nasty kick in the spleen then I say "Bad luck". I have almost developed a belief that things take place only at the destined hour and that we mortals cannot alter the calendar of events—even trivial. I have learnt this from personal experience. There arose occasions in my life, when I was all excitement and fuss and thought that the hours and days were simply dragging wearily through. I had done the best that I could bring out, mustered up all my fighting capacity and fought with a terrific fierceness. But I didn't succeed. I had, on each occasion just failed to hit the bull's eye. The bull, in fact, had taken me on his horns of dilemma and I was thrown on each occasion, fortunately on the soft soil of less unpleasant predicaments and thus kept my limbs in tact. That was the stage when I had reached the saturation point of efforts and such was my mental stage when the slippery figure of Fate, the master clown, appeared.

When we say that some people are born lucky or unlucky we only mean that all things in life either go quite swimmingly with them or that they don't—always. The lucky dogs would even arrive, right in time to catch a train on a hot Sunday afternoon and thus avoid the waste of half an hour.

or so. They would get a useful present in a two anna lottery. Inspite of the fact that they are just ordinary, or even sub-normal fellows, they would hold high posts of importance and wield great influence as a consequence. Servants and chauffeurs would humbly bow as they pass by, glowing with the radiance of wealth and social position. For the ordinarily lucky, good jobs would be simply waiting for them as it were, beautiful and charming maids would be languishly pining on balcony-tops for them or if balcony-top is too much for an ordinary fellow, at least the apology of it that spreads out in humble quarters. His distant relation might die at dawn of heart-attack as suddenly as he would get the small, unexpected legacy and some such things that generally keep those fellows smiling all through their lives. They may not be rich but they are happy with what they have and we call them lucky. The other lot, that fills the globe and sheds out tears of individual sufferings, sorrows, hunger and disease, collectively develops them into oceans of poverty, misery, discontent, murder, crime, wrath, malice and rancour. We find it too often that this world is a place full of people who weep in darkness and die in cold because most of us are just ordinary, poor, sub-normal heroes.

Against this bleak and dreary back-ground of the sufferings of millions does blaze forth the splendour of the lucky few. The chances, in all

probability, are that we might belong to the unfortunate category. I plod through life with such a premonition and then wage a war with my Fate. I am not certain as to who would win the battle.

* * *

II

MATRIMONY

MATRIMONY is a twin-engined, coupleh affair that is singular in the beginning and plural in the end or the other way round according as the players play the game. To begin with, matrimony is a physical affair, and though this may sound harsh, yet it is a harsh truth. We are human first and sentimental afterwards. This binding for life, therefore, demands a physical and mental accommodation, and it is good that it should. Man has hit upon the splendid idea of matrimony after a good deal of animal co-habitation and afterwards thought, as he was evolved into a rational product, that some kind of restriction should be clapped on the Adam and Eve for the births of legitimate children and a society. Matrimony, thus assumed the aspect of an altruistic and strictly personal vocation. The boy got married and scarcely knew what he did!

I have said that marriage is a two sided affair but it aims at only one side, that of mutual happy-

ness. The problem of creating happiness out of married life has become so very complex these days and in these days only because I think girls are getting precocious. Not only they talk as much as their older sisters did but also they know too much and read too much and understand too little from it. A modern girl may be all finery herself when it is a matter of her personal decoration but behind her finery there lurks such a practical outlook that an enthusiastic aesthete wouldn't imagine that the sweet little thing before him can think independently in terms of rupees. I am talking here of matrimony, in general and I am also describing the traits of modern wives in general too. So very annoying has been the fair product that I have heard people wishing to go back to the good old days, and having as partners, those truly marvellous females, at once obedient and gentle girls, as their co-partners! This may sound a bit anachronistic to a "progressive" adult but there is some truth in what some people of the type, I mentioned, say. Whatever the reasons, there are a larger number of unhappy couples in this "rational" world than ever there were in the days that have passed.

Every decade is seeing some startling change in our women. The husband, in the good old days was a sort of "scare-woman"—worse than a scarecrow. Gradually he lost his ground and became what he is now. The woman, no doubt, has got

the better of man to-day. She has been as efficient as the man, in many a sphere. This feeling of equality has permeated deep in social consciousness far and wide with the result that husbands have been toned down beyond recognition. All this, I say, is good. The only bad thing from my point of view is the accentuation of the sense of their being too practical. This has gone to the extent of measuring a man and his worth from his ability to earn. Pay-scales are becoming the barometers of matrimonial love and as normal husbands cannot score a spectacular figure, they are being clean bowled by the modern times. Girls would rather prefer a well-dressed idiot, having a rich father to an intelligent, simple and well-bred poor chap. It is the silver that is making such a vital difference in the ways of the eyes and this is not, I think, a healthy development. Some people may not agree with what I have said. They may say, "All this is nonsense. Women are women and they are what they were". I do not quite agree.

Times have changed, so have the girls.. With such a radical difference in their internal constitution, it is not surprising that husbands fall short of their expectations. Almost every girl imagines, a tall, well-educated, intelligent, sports-loving, fairly well-placed youth as her partner. She usually gets the vision of this youth through reading too many exotic novels and seeing too many

stupid pictures. In reality what she gets is a stunted, fairly well-educated, normally intelligent, not quite well-placed, promotion-yearning piner and it is not unnatural under such circumstances, that the silky thread of matrimony may slowly break asunder. Both of them have done a fairly good amount of reading. Education has given them a wider outlook and greater expectations. Tragically enough, the actual life becomes a perpetual struggle between a meagre purse and the serious drain on the debit side. So much of leisure is wasted in scheming about short-cuts to riches that the man who should bloom forth fully, dries himself through in the process of a miserable existence. I am talking here of the lower-middle-class, clerical husband, and the stage that he usually passes through. He has heard of marriage as the happy union of two souls, but what he actually experiences is a terrific conflict between the struggle for survival and the struggle for enjoyment. To add to a pile of miseries, there is the eternal fear of the birth of a baby that is so harassingly disquieting that no words can adequately describe that mental torture. Such, briefly, are the obstacles of the common man when he faces fully the onslaught of real life with a circumspect, expectant partner. Life is not a novel by a complacent author with all chapters arranged for heroes and heroines to strike good luck and live happily ever after. It is sheer drudgery for almost

all. How then one is to carve out the melon of matrimonial happiness? How, when the economic balance is precariously tipping on the wrong side, can one maintain his balance of mind and be happy? A difficult situation indeed! Yet that is what I have actually gone through and am going through still. Honestly I believe that it demands a man with courage and fortitude to withstand such withering fire from life—and such withering fire when one is without any protection whatsoever. Unless he is a tough soldier he will soon be a casualty, or at least will get a nasty wound.

But in all this din of the battle of emotions, the sweet lullaby of matrimonial companionship renders a peaceful sanctuary in spite of the turmoil of life and the perennial fatigue of a mere sub-human survival. That lullaby is sung by the wife herself. Women can sometimes reach such a tremendous height of sentimental excellence, that man, who is stiffer than woman but emotionally brittle, would crack himself thoroughly, but for the perpetual, guiding and forbearing protection of an enduring spouse. This statement might apparently contradict my words in the beginning, but I believe our modern girls too have still maintained the rudiments of the glorious Indian womanhood, though with difficulty. I say with difficulty, because our progressive, educated and cultured lot of ladies are still in the emancipation stage and are now in the process of being

very few. No emphasis or the so-called
criticise of the middle class can and should the
many great as but a minority, all up to it and out
of it are fit and widely scattered. I have said it,
but emphasis of course is to that only the educated
know the general property can shake out a nucleus
there and share the successively, I must say to
standing and selection. Marriage then becomes
a literary preparation in all its respects. A man
has it with a good lot of tact in much more
welcome towards the end of a dying day than
an intellectual full of literary taste and probably
as a writer, a poet, a reader. The artistic
and a literary mind isn't given a organiza-
here and the poor creature goes on screaming
unhappily that a day would dawn when these mate-
rialistic study would be simply stunned by his
achievements. Usually they aren't.

I would like to say a little about the baby that
a modern couple bring forth. Let me remind my
readers, that I am always writing and sympathising
with the common, lower middle class father unless I
make a specific mention to the contrary. The birth
of a baby is such a happy event. It is the new,
strengthening link in the chain of a family new stren-
ghening. Nothing pleases me more than children—
children of whatever description. The poor
couple tries to smother the production of a child, not
because the young fellow is ashamed to be a father,
not because the infirm, delicate thing is frightened

yearns for marriage, if not for its sake, at least through the desire to contact somebody of the opposite sex. His picture going and novel reading has already given him a sufficient sensuous stimulation to make some physical move. The impulse within triumphs over all self-control and all considerations, and he plunges into the matrimonial pond with a hot head, a warm heart and nimble limbs. Why is it that we see usually after a year or so, the same fellow with a saner head, a luke-warm heart and drooping limbs? I can safely say that his biological urge had had a square deal and he should therefore be a little plump as a consequence. That is not so in most cases. A terrific smashing on the economic front, the knockouts of reality on his dreamy head and the full realization of his onerous responsibility as a husband and the thorough assimilation of the matrimonial implications have made him a bit morose, despondent and even desperate. He would play the game of life, thereafter, in the spirit of the gambler and success or failure wouldn't touch his benumbed sensibilities. That is what the common man does. He struggles this way and then sometimes "improves" his lot a bit and smiles faintly over petty gains. The gain of an anna, through the forgetfulness of a tram-conductor would please him. So low has he sunk. Should some unexpected invitation for a party or tea chance upon him, there would he broaden his face

into a pitiable grin, attempting to be jovial and secretly calculating how much would he gain actually thereby. His voracious instincts would blaze forth an inferno in his tummy and awkwardly would he behave at the party. His poor attire he wouldn't mind, though his wife would and as she would make mental notes of her personal poverty, he wouldn't mind his clerical, sartorial shabbiness, but would like a hungry wolf devour the delicacies that he had simply eyed covetously in his tiffin-time in high-class restaurants. This is life, and this is matrimony. As years roll on, a perpetual background of despondency develops in the minds of the couple and reflects itself in a worried, lined and haggard expression that proclaims its own story. The unfortunate couple sees prosperity around and grows imperceptibly envious, wantonly, acrimonious and irritatingly cantankerous. All this has an economic back-ground. I personally think that should, by some miracle, official or otherwise, the standard of life of the lower-middle-class intellectual or the clerical community, be suddenly raised to something decent, the world of cupid, would see a race of couples, quite different from the present one; a world of cheerful, healthy, sportive gay Adams and Eves that would then walk the glorious path of life, with one hand round each other's waists, signifying a complete union, both physical and

mental and living it through with the gifts of chubby kiddies weighing seven pounds odd and transforming this earth into a veritable paradise.

* *
*

13

ACCOMMODATION

MY wishful thinking at the end of the last chapter can be realized, though not in *toto*, yet to a reasonable degree, by the reciprocal process of accommodation – accommodation of each other in a way that would be advantageous to both. Life is not a one man game. It is a game that the whole world plays collectively and finds no end to it. Every man and woman plays it independently too, and tries his or her dice in turn as an insignificant atom of a gigantic gamblers' den and plays the part assigned. This necessitates his contact with his fellow beings and contact starts half the troubles of this world. We fail to accommodate each other because normally we are so much self-centred and selfish that we fail to look beyond the orbit of personal gain. This passion for personal gain and possession is so consuming that we usually fail to catch the other man's point of view and in our enthusiasm to

further our end, create a rancour that pervades and permeates a detestable aroma around us.

I try my level best to accommodate persons of all shades in my world and sometimes. I displease many because I try to please many. Accommodation implies in itself some degree of sacrifice and there is a limit to one's altruism. If a friend asks for a loan and if I have the money, I simply throw it on him with so much willingness that it would appear that I have a moral duty to help my friend in need and that I am not doing anything marvellous by being of a little help to him. Yet with so much sincerity and good-will have I come across persons, whom I have obliged by dishing out whatever little I had and who, not only have not returned the precious little sum but also have cut off their personal contact with me either because they have not been able to repay it or because they were scoundrels under the gentlemanly guise. It is indeed difficult to get on with such cads but I am a simple and straight fellow and cannot go deep into the hearts of such men and sense their rascality. I have a bad habit of making an illusory presumption that the world around is a snug little place with nice, obliging, grateful fellows who would take help and give. Needless to say, I have been disillusioned. I have thereafter attempted to strike a "practical" attitude. Of all the things on earth, I confess, I am utterly incapable of being a dry, calculating and practical

materialist, inspite of my best efforts. I have been a loser on this account but the pleasure of getting duped is not inconsiderable !

Human nature is so kind and so cruel, so sympathetic and so cold, so generous and so miserly, so frank and so reticent, that the life, which is, the collective effect of all these and more, becomes a complex business wherein the normal fellow, at the end of his last day, finds himself still a student earnestly solving the problem of life. A normal existence has so many obligatory demands that have to be fulfilled during the short time available, that a man finds "no time" to snatch even a few moments for meditation and introspection. Apart from the usual and compulsory obligations of feeding and clothing the family, his infirm person has to stand such a tremendous strain of shouldering alone a tumbling economic structure that his physical self is corroded from within in that ghastly experiment. Accommodation is quite an easy affair when silver is cheap and plenty in the house and the host is in a good, genial, receptive mood as a consequence. It is not that this generation is less hospitable than the last but that diminishing hospitality is the correct index of the financial deterioration of the community, and consequently, of the individual. Our fathers and grand-fathers were economically less unstable, and leading a simpler life which found them on the credit side to the extent of being comfortably

hospitable to all and sundry. We often hear that our grand-father or our father or our uncle frequently used to dine with half a dozen children from the neighbourhood. The reason is obvious. Rice was cheap and plenty and when paddy-fields render a bumper crop, and keep the host well-fed with that produce, it is really difficult to be malicious or unpleasant. Not so in the present times. Rice is scarce. The host is harassed as his fields do not yield him an income even to squeeze out an honourable existence for himself and his family. Therefore, he cannot think of calling his sons' friends for a dinner. Not that he doesn't wish it—he cannot. His hospitable and generous impulses have been crushed under the steam-roller of tough circumstances and thus we get the normal man to-day, a non-interfering, unclubbable, retiring fellow who wouldn't bear even a minute change in his routine life. For him accommodation would be an economic proposition and I for myself would submit that here lies the real test of the man. As long as philosophy and teachings cannot buy a loaf of bread by themselves alone, and as long as money can, money would be the deciding factor in all matters. Of course, I am not losing a sense of proportion while glorifying the mammons. The point is, the spirit of accommodation is essentially bound up with financial stability which goes a long way in lubricating many vital parts of actions and reac-

tions that would otherwise have been clogged. Apart from this apparently essential prerequisite, the mental make-up of the individual is more important. Rich fellows are not necessarily, hospitable, generous and genial. Often they are a selfish, greedy, high-browed lot and are savage and inhuman in their dealings with their fellow-beings and subordinates. They may change their old car and furniture for a new one every season, they may squander a few thousands for a "change" in the high hill-stations, they may make a trip round the world and amaze the foreign shopkeepers by their appalling waste of silver, or they may empty their ill-gotten wealth on the race-track, but should one of their own servants ask for financial relief because his son is dying in the free hospital or should some secretary of a humanitarian society approach them for a donation, then all their miserly instincts, their preserving capacity and their nauseating haughtiness leaps to a new pinnacle and coldly they shout "No ! I have nothing to do with such silly things." That is a different lot of humanity that is rotting in the extra-sweet juice of an epicurean philosophy and always dies of some incurable disease, especially diabetes. They wouldn't accommodate. The world around tries to accommodate itself to suit such men. Not so with the common man.. He has to accommodate himself to suit the world around. It is not rare

that he has to twist himself out of shape to become acceptable as a useful citizen. Thus we see a supersensitive poet being hammered into a mechanician, a journalist into a time-keeper, a painter into a jobber, a musician into a factory-welder, a sculptor into a clerk and a clerk into a machine. I am including the clerk because I would like this poor intellectual to be in company with other unfortunate artists. That is accommodation. Thus I see a confusion of misfits, pulling pitifully their full weight against their will or make-up, making pathetic attempts at being happy in their spare hours, sleeping peacefully in the din of a roaring factory or a hammering workshop, loving girls with apprehension because it demands at least a three figure salary, visiting cinema theatres to drown their worries and disappointments and fighting savagely to improve their lot and their persons and doing their best to accommodate one another.

* *
*

14

PARENTS.

I would like to say of parents in general for the extraordinary reason that my parents are quite exceptional. I am not making this statement blinded by maternal and paternal love.

I would gradually justify my remarks throughout the course of this chapter. We often forget that our father and mother just constitutes another couple and that the normal expectations and failures are also their lot. We are apt to forget this all important factor for the obvious reason that a father and a mother occupies such a distinctly unique and reverential position in our lives that our partial view, so far as they are concerned is pardonable. It would jar even the seasoned nerves if a sex-analyst for example, tells us that we all are the unintentional productions of a direct co-habitation between a certain man and a certain woman, that our birth was not an obligatory process but a living certificate of the entire satisfaction of a young couple's carnal instincts. This is too much, really. Atleast it is too much for me. I can visualize a young father and a bonny mother deeply engrossed in curtain lectures and nestling with each other in the presence of their sleeping first-born who heaves beside them his tiny self while all this physical tomfoolery goes on. All this is understandable. Such human traits are to be extolled and I see nothing wrong in all that. After all, our progenitor was also once a young man, our mother was also a young woman and one cannot too easily break off the habit of a life-time !

Parents suffer too much because they raise too many expectations about their children and rarely are any fulfilled. The sanguine mother, caressing

her young son in a darkish room imagines that her baby would be a "great-fellow" and that people would say *she* is his mother. The father thinks that he had been such a miserable failure as a man of the world and happily dreams that his son would score where he had failed and thus compensate to a little extent his disappointments. Nothing usually takes place. I mean, nothing uncommon takes place in the life of the child and a disillusioned father then expires with hopes unfulfilled. My point is, common men shouldn't expect uncommon children though they should do their utmost to make them so. My father expected of me that I should stick up somewhere in a subordinate position in a good office and thus be able to "stand on my legs." I have been reasonably fortunate to secure a subordinate position in a good office but I am not quite sure whether I would be able to stand on my legs. To the extent of securing an inglorious position, I have fulfilled my father's expectations, and though I am highly dissatisfied with it, my father is not and thinks that I am a fool to be dissatisfied with what little I have. Older men think in saner ways and he hopes that a few years will see me well-placed. How can I convince him that it is not exactly the money that I want nor the limelight of a good position but something entirely different which he wouldn't even imagine? My mother doesn't bother about my accomplishments-either. good

or bad. She sees to it that I am well fed, am not ill and that I cover myself up thoroughly even in summer, before I go to bed. She never inquires as to why I am late or why I am early, but there is always a hot dinner inspite of my late presence and a cup of hot tea would greet my early arrival. Therefore, my mother has that amount of ascetic disregard for wealth which I pretend to harbour and though most of her ascetism is born out of colossal ignorance, that is not a bad thing either. Not so with my Papa. He is an extremely intelligent, witty, and cynical person whose fortitude and courage are simply marvellous. Fortunately, he underestimates his sons and this has helped me a good deal in posing myself a perfect mediocre, which I am. When he tells me his youthful antics, I yearn to have been born in that simpler, purer and milder world, where jobs waited at your feet and young fellows kicked them at their sweet will as it were. When I hear of his rapid progress of promotion in his office, I simply wish that the world should go back twenty-five years and offer such chances as were offered to fathers of the last generation. Minimum education, maximum pay was the order of the day and though parents of the bygone generation take pride in advertising that they were an efficient lot, yet the fact was that they were always living in a world when competition was almost unknown. Mothers were a healthy set of womanhood with broad waists and

round shoulders and had no more expectations from life than two square meals and a place to lie low and snore upon. The birth of a child was not a family catastrophe and a dozen children was a normal score. Girls married without higgling and delivered without any ado. Kiddies thrived wonderfully on a handful of rice and bellyful of water, and didn't usually die prematurely. A rupee was something really round, and jingled well. Recreation had not made itself a compulsory obligation on the family and infant recreation was regarded as a sign of distinct deterioration. A group of stoic stalwarts was ruling the society then and all around was well and good. Such were the general conditions wherein my father and mother and probably your father and mother had grown into marriagable youngsters and made the blunder of giving us a birth though the blunder was committed through sheer inadvertance and chance. They, therefore, let their children alone and allowed them to drift and didn't bother as much as we would bother about ours. The theory that every mortal will have his share of his morsel of food somewhere, had a fatalistic origin. This well-disciplined healthy lot of fathers and mothers were at once genial and very strict in certain matters, very meticulous, and very careless in others, and were as a rule, a straightforward, God-fearing species that had a long span of life and enjoyed it according to their ideas and ideals.

I am tempted to write more about the parents that were. I loved that type, those tenacious, robust couples that braved all obstacles with Indian stoicism and waged a magnificent war with life. That magnanimous, hospitable, and loquacious class is fast fading out. Their utter simplicity, both in their attire and heart was a real achievement of a spiritual and personal uplift. Their superstitious disposition had a peculiar charm of its own as this superstition was the repository of many ghost-stories and personal experiences. Tap skilfully any grand old man and he would at once pour out his multiple stories of supernatural and frightful contacts, Old, crumbling houses that were haunted by spirits and how he had actually lived there would be his chief one. By the way, it is interesting to note that ghosts that have the benefit of invisibility always prefer odd places like the cemetery and desolate houses as their residences !

My father too tells me ghost stories and though it is difficult to believe in all, it is equally difficult to disbelieve in all of them. I believe in my father, not only because he is my father but also because he scarcely lies. My mother's stories are not quite so picturesque but they have always a theme wherein some woman was the victim of supernatural buffoonery or unfathomable witchcraft! All that is very interesting to hear, and I love to hear such experiences from the aged.

My early remembrance of my father is that he was a reddish, violent and a very strict man with a very loud voice and louder personality. He wouldn't talk, he would thunder but while talking with me, suddenly would he drop that unpleasant crescendo and whistle out his fondlings as it were. My memory reflects a stocky, almost short woman as my mother who continuously coughed and coughs to this day. I can hear her do so while writing these lines. As for my father, he has lost his colour, his strictness, his voice and even a little of his personality due to age. He does not now lower his voice for fear of frightening me as he did when I was a boy, but maintains his usual volume and talks with me on mutton, fish and mangoes. My mother is as silent a woman as she was twenty four years ago and would remain so to her last day. She is simple to the point of being a simpleton, while he is sharp to the point of brilliance. I would have been lucky had I been even a compromise of the two but I do not quite know to which side I err. There they are, watching us pass a dull, monotonous life, a mere repetition and a revised and spoiled edition of their own existence. They see the futility of our life but console themselves as we lead an "honourable" one, that is we don't borrow, and if we borrow, we readily return. Also that we do not quarrel with our neighbours and vice versa. What more can parents of common men like you

and me expect than such petty consolations and such shadowy reliefs? They count the days silently, as they fly past, cough with it to keep tune with their rushing hours and take a walk in the evening to keep themselves fit and live longer but catch cold and die of pneumonia or some such nasty thing that is too much for any human doctor. Thus they sit and gaze serenely at the face of the changing world, the heart of the changing son and the sweet vision of a budding grandson that they seriously presume would be somebody's incarnation.

* *
*

15

BROTHERS

HERE is something unique in our chain of deep family relations. A brother is one's living embodiment in another person. He is the same dish, prepared out of the same pot and the same heat though the heat may differ in the calories of a diminishing youth.

I consider myself lucky in having a brother who is almost a nobleman without his wealth, or more correctly, lost wealth. He has an ample nose that bespeaks a warm genial heart and his nose doesn't lie. He is a calm retiring, well-meaning gentleman, and is terribly afraid of ladies. I wonder how he would describe me!

Brothers as a rule agree too much in their childhood but disagree much more in their youth and thereafter. Quite the contrary has been our case. Not that we broke each other's head when we were kiddies but that we were so different from the very infancy in our natures and habits that we never brushed with each other too closely to have a scuffle. Then as we grew into men, our mutual love and understanding grew with our years and we are quite happy now.

I wonder when brothers quarrel violently and go to the length of committing atrocities. It is a resounding victory of greed and selfishness, conceit and egoism. There are, of course, reasons why such clashes are a frequent occurrence. Normally, one gets on all right with others because one's interest doesn't clash with others. It is only the brother, in fact, one of our own counterparts, who shares our happiness and miseries, our legacy and paternal debts, that comes in the picture and as a sharer of the sunshine and storm, is often not only not loved and respected as the years roll on, but also there are some, who are unwilling to give him even a mere cognizance ! I have seen a few instances of brothers who wouldn't dine alone, who wouldn't sleep quite comfortably if one or the other has gone as a guest somewhere, who would dress alike, talk alike and while walking, even jerk their shoulders with a uniform tilt. All this physical and mental harmony was, in all the cases a sweet

memory of the bygone days. I had the misfortune to see them drift apart in the ocean of life more and more as they grew in age and their brotherly love developed gradually into brotherly acrimony. We all know that when we begin to hate somebody whom we loved sincerely before, we hate with a terrific intensity and that is what actually happens amongst some unfortunate brothers. It is indeed remarkable that they always disagree seriously after the age of twenty one or so. I think there are atleast two obvious reasons. First is that, in their blissful ignorance, children play with godly innocence, more especially the brothers in the sensitive stage and if one of them is attacked by a neighbouring boy, the brothers invariably unite and fight out the issue. I know of a certain case wherein, two brothers as mere kiddies fought with and pulled out the hairs of the children around with all unity and later owing to a dispute over property, became bitter enemies of each other and each one marked the time with the coldness of a seasoned murderer to give the other one a sound beating. The other reason, appears to me more complicated. I imagine that a majority of brothers agree to disagree because their wives do not agree. Brothers of this type are usually docile, almost hen-pecked and submissive fellows and as they are utterly incapable of commanding anybody or atleast as they are utterly incapable of commanding their

wives; they choose the lesser evil and break off brotherly relations in preference to domestic discord. Brothers are firstly males and are as a consequence more forebearing, more generous and less mindful of petty affairs. Not so with their wives. They come from different families, are bred up and brought up in different environments, have different shades of mentality as they are the products of different parents and have nothing common in them except jealousy, malice and sex. The brothers may love each other with all their hearts but there is no earthly reason why they should love each other so as to score a victory over their cantankerous disposition. Especially with a modern woman, who has developed her sense of possession and greed, and who, with the help of an insipid education has sharpened the tip of her gilt-edged tongue and has narrowed her vision to a two-peoples world, brothers are getting a hard nut to crack. They have to fight an emotional battle between the love of their partner or the love of what their wives would like to call, mere parasites, and the wives, in almost all instances, succeed and derive the immense satisfaction of cracking up a family, knocking down the brothers and bringing the home-front under their supreme command. A friend of mine tapped my door at a very odd hour, and I heard his tapping when it was raining heavily and a tempestuous wind was rocking the trees around and lightning was

thundering too hoarsely to let anyone sleep. I opened the door slowly and saw him dripping wet, and in all that rolling of drops over his person, he was shedding a tear or two, which I could immediately distinguish from the rest. The rain may be the Nature's tears but a man's tears are different and I would call myself a big fool if I am not able to differentiate between them. He smiled faintly through his tears and I beckoned him in. Without asking what was wrong, I gave him a towel, warm clothes and a warmer cup of steaming hot tea. He rubbed his tears and his sore expression and laughing merrily like a wayward child said almost in a jocular tone that his brother had turned him out at that hour because his wife insisted on my friend's departure immediately, or else she would depart. I tried to console him, but he was not in need of it at all and told me that he felt nothing about the sad incident, except the biting remembrance that his brother should kick him out not for personal reasons but to respect the whims of an eccentric outsider ! I said, as we shared a single warm blanket between us, spreading ourselves on a not too-clean single bed, " Well ! My dear fellow ! This is life. The woman is like fire - a good servant but bad master !!!

MORE ABOUT BROTHERS

I would like to have at least one more brother because we are only two, including myself. It is interesting how two and three make such a vital difference. Like company, three is company, two is none. A couple of brothers do not usually complete the picture of a family but a third one would at once make it full and nothing would then be thought as wanting.

I sympathise deeply with the unfortunate fellow who is alone, who has neither a brother nor a sister. He is the solitary traveller without company and his is not an enviable position. Such a gentleman lives with such a sense of biting seclusion and relative desolation that the consequent dependency, that at first, springs up sporadically, crystallizes into a habitual depression and no earthly pleasures can drive that craving look away or substitute anything in its place. If I had no brother at all, or a sister, my life would have been a perpetual matter of boredom and loneliness and I am happy that it is not so. I have one brother and one sister, just the minimum required for keeping me up in cheerful spirits. Of course, my cheerful spirits are not prejudiced because my sister is married to a worthy gentleman and I have no other sister to worry about. I also enjoy the envi-

able position to be the last of my father's mistakes and I have thus the privilege of committing a few follies which my family ignores, giving me every time the benefit of my age, ignorance and their forbearance.

It is amusing to observe how brothers, who are the products of the same flesh and blood, are quite different from one another, in intellectual calibre, emotional intensity, and as men of the world. While one of them is rolling in a Rolls Royce, the other may be serving a term of rigorous imprisonment, while one may be a holy priest, the other may be a dangerous assassin, while one may be the town's financial wizard, the other may be begging round the street corner, while one may be a first-rate actor, the other may be the door-keeper while one may be an excellent pianist, the other may be a muscular black-smith. This peculiar allocation of paradoxical positions to people of the same family sometimes provides such a cynical amusement that one wonders whether after all destiny guides the ways of us poor mortals and whether we are just mere tools for that purpose to further the destined end. The interests of brothers shouldn't as a rule clash, for the reason that as men of the world they have it at their disposal to exploit it to the full and derive wordly success from. No amount of success of a single individual restricts the scope of any other individual for taking his turn. Inspite of this, there are a few

unpleasant brushes between them for selfish reasons like inherited property. Human greed is such a consuming fire that with the help of the firewood of convenient love and the ill-wind of unreasonableness, the leaping flames of possession fan brotherly relations into a smouldering heap and turns it into ashes of frustrated hopes and permanent severance. For this reason, I think, there are a good number of rich brothers who die of palpitation, dreading the intrusion of their brothers as partners in their property and a good number of poor, ordinary brothers, who love each other sincerely and do not die of palpitation but of malnutrition and consumption. But I am sure that in their weaker breasts, emphasized by eloquent ribs, there beats a poor man's heart, that is pumping the red blood of generosity, good-will and mutual understanding. I have said before that a good many brothers change entirely with their marriages. This matrimonial adventure flings them headlong into a land where there is room normally for only two living souls and accommodation for others can be secured only if the two agree to sacrifice substantially for the newcomers. Men are getting selfish and women have been so from times immemorial and again it is the economic frailty that has made them sentimentally infirm. Apart from this aspect, to my mind it appears that brothers are getting too practical, are losing respect for each other, their wives are

creating too much domestic trouble, and the brothers, men as they are, are sinking so low as to pay attention to it. The time has gone when the eldest brother was the deputy of the father and a manager of the home when the father was no more and his influence and word reigned supreme. We are applying the inequitable principle of equality quite too often and losing at the same time the sense of proportion and the result has been that we see a group of family members putting up together as an economic convenience, and detaching themselves at the same time from each other with so much perseverance that even a casual visitor can perceive on his first arrival their utter formality of manners, coldness of hearts, and absence of brotherly love.

* *
*

17

SISTERS

A man usually speaks highly of his sister when she is well-placed. Normal sisters who marry because they aren't capable of anything better and periodically deliver because they are consistently efficient at that do but pardonable offences if they are rich—or if rather their husbands are rich. It is rare to find a person who sincerely loves his sister

and when he does so, he probably is one of those rare fortunates who has only a single sister to worry about. The sisters has always been a bumper crop on this earth and brothers may perish quite in their infancy but sisters hold tenaciously to life and grow like wild trees to strike terror into the hearts of their parents and sunshine into the hearts of youths. It is almost ungrateful to write about our sisters in this fashion as our mother was also somebody else's sister or atleast somebody else's daughter. The sister is a patchwork of the softer elements and is responsible for the refinement of her brothers by virtue of her mere presence in the household and is an ornament of the same. She is, when a maid, usually, the quite, serene person who trips about the rooms with an angelic grace, spills the inkpots through her maidenly haste to decorate herself at a moment's notice, consumes all sore fruits with an astonishing voracity, thereafter coughs with all her throat, occasionally turns a patient to worry her parents and generally does her best to become a liability on the family with amazing consistency. It is interesting to note that such girls thrive into sturdy women immediately after wedlock !

But this is a darker side of this lighter species. It is quite essential that one must have at least one sister. She is the young sweet thing that at once creates a beautiful atmosphere in the home. The rustic humour of the brothers can be brought to a

gentleman's limit by her presence. Her innocent queries and silly ideas will provide to pretentious, overwise brothers, a good deal of jolly fun and laughter. Her clean dress and tidy habits will at once reflect on the dirty brothers and out of shame, if not out of desire, they would waste a little more water to wash their limbs clean only to spoil them again. She and her girl friends are good targets for ridicule and it is a pleasure to tease them all and see them weep ! They cry quite easily and at command and so much proficiency do they acquire in this eye-control and tear-control, that in their afterlives they use this deadly weapon against the same, awkward species of males - the husbands and thus cow them down. The apprenticeship for this bursting physical phenomenon, is performed with official regularity in their rightful homes and this, as I have mentioned above, becomes more of a boon to them than a bane !

Two sisters is a different proposition than two brothers. They are almost like two peas without anything to distinguish between - I mean to distinguish between aspects other than physical. They would dress together, put up a false face together, wouldn't be tired of looking at each other, much less so to talk about their looks and faces and generally live in a world of innocence and folly, petty-mindedness and frailty, conceit and a presumptuous glamour. They would go out for a walk together as brothers usually wouldn't

and there discuss and criticise all the passing parade of fashions with a foolish enthusiasm. Blouses and Saris, skirts and hair, lip-sticks and stockings, all would be crushed beneath the sarcastic steam-roller of young maids' biting criticism and what a delight would it give them? War and the peace, politics and education, social reforms and the poverty problem wouldn't worry them and lightly would they heave and chatter about all dainties, studying all through the wakeful hours and securing just passing marks! Yes ! the sisters are an essential nuisance in every home and though the brothers would be too glad to get rid of them, their parents wouldn't. They act as a sort of mental clinic and are generally amiable because they are delightfully stupid. This essential pre-requisite of their class goes a long way in keeping them in good cheer and it is because of their petty-mindedness that we usually see them giggling with mirth and smiling with jollity. This wonderful knack of keeping themselves contented and at ease provides many a satisfied housewife that can stand the strain of a calamitous life and turbulent days and husbands who are somebody's brothers as a rule, should remember that it is the immense and almost spiritual force within the woman, who is somebody's sister, as a rule, that has helped them stand the terrible strain of a domestic tottering or bitter adversity. I have extolled the sisters too much here and feel like

arranging a climb-down for them. It is surprising that sisters are jealous of each other. Many a sister would flash out a glance of wrath on reading this but let me tell them that it is so. Often the jealousy is so faint and imperceptible that the harbourer isn't aware that there lurks in the bosom of her heart its green poison all unaware. The reasons are not quite serious for such an unhealthy development. Better face and looks, longer hair, better height, better eyes, nose, voice, in fact anything that is physically better can start the evil game and though jealousy would appear to be too harsh a term, I would say that it is modified and refined jealousy—that is jealousy, without a sting or remorse and a habitual mental working that sub-consciously is trained to take a comparative view of the physical side and then regret inwardly for the coarseness of the features, or the shortness of the hair, the wrong slant in the eye, the awkward mount of the nose, the masculine tone of the tone, and some such inferior physical equipment in general.

A rich sister and a poor sister are thus jealous in a different sense. The fat income of the one and the slender of the other makes such a tremendous difference in their lives that the plump and wealthy sister is shocked by her sister's appalling poverty or low standard of living, and to see her unlucky companion of the younger days, chattering harshly amongst a group of noxious children

and pouring down her tumbler of misfortunes. This economic discrepancy strikes truly at the cords of the sensitive sister and strikes so bluntly that even if she endeavours to check back a welling tear, and succeeds in that pitiable attempt, still as the gathering, consoling darkness gathers around, she takes refuge in its bleak dreariness and pours a string of bitter tears that drench distinctly the soiled pillow. Sisters may be leading a generally innocent life prior to their marriage and might be getting on all right without a brush, but it is the matrimony that divides them all and places them high or low according as they deserve or their Fate desires. When but sisters, the impartial father and the loving mother might give them an equal share of sweetmeats or equally cheap cloth and sarees, or equal amount of care and attention. But Destiny is less unscrupulous and mindful for such individual attention and hurls them as it wishes. In those good old days of childhood and maidenhood, their dress, their looks, their faces, their ribbons, their sarees, their books, their fright for the opposite-sex, their empty money-bags, their hair-pins, their lost compass-box, their leaning hand-writing, their horror for dark, their superstitious propensities, their fond attachment to their parents, their awe-inspired love for their brothers, their simple enjoyments and simpler ideas was their innocent, personal world, they were roaming about and consequently had no occasion

to clash with each other, as their interest, their outlook, their joys, their hopes, their expectations were usually identical and they were a harmonious lot, on that account. Their life after twenty demands a sterner attitude and this attitude is always linked up with the fate of their partners. I say again that I would like to have a sister more. After all, they are a transient element in our family and permeate a dainty atmosphere of homeliness and security. They rub away our rustic angularities and help us to bring out better elements within us. They may appear an apparent nuisance and a substantial liability but that would be censuring the order of the world, the society and the family. The brothers that think that they are superior by virtue of their sex are leaning too much on Nature for their superiority and are not what they profess. On the other hand, the sisters that think, that the males—or the brothers, are a clumsy lot of bearded humanity, with dirty habits and bad manners are neither so clumsy, nor so bearded, nor so dirty and ill-mannered as their poor, normal brains appear to conceive. We both are good.



THOSE GRAND MOTHER-IN-LAWS!

YES, those grand old mother-in-laws are fast disappearing and this, I maintain, is an irreparable loss. Mother-in-laws there are, there will be, but not those that were—the typically Indian specimen, physically robust, mentally healthy, practically spiritual and spiritually practical incarnations of the glorious womanhood of mother India.

It is a traditional allegation that they were hard task-masters and were harsh—harsh out of all proportions towards their daughter-in-laws. I do not deny the allegation in toto. But, in fairness one must imagine the good, old, prosperous days and live in imagination therein, just for a few moments, visualize the still rustic atmosphere, the still simpler ways of the world and men then, and then attempt to form an idea of the social conditions obtaining at that time, to assimilate adequately the psychological implications and mental background that chiseled out such stern but loving characters as are perceptible in this vanishing race. I must give the devil his due and admit that they were, as a whole, a fine lot of well-bred women, who had only a limited amount of womanly intelligence with the added advantage of nurturing blissful ignorance and enforced stupidity which went a long way in making many a husband happy,

and many a daughter-in-law, miserable. The chronic disease of 'education' had not eaten up their finer tissues of nobler, womanly qualities and their moderately prospering household was a sincere and hospitable sanctuary for almost anybody. Plenty of food had imbued them with a sense of generosity, but the limited gamut of agricultural produce, counted in silver, had given them a proper financial perspective and the enforcement of its consequent rigidity was the sole privilege of a young and erring daughter-in-law ! Daughter-in-laws were just babes and toiled with a little more intelligence than donkeys. They were just beasts of burden under the military shepherdship of a vigilant mother-in-law. The husband of the girl—the old dame's son, was usually a truant school-boy and it is not difficult to keep schoolboys under thumb. The strength of character and that of hand were keeping down all the juvenile follies of youth in the house and such suppression of youthful dialations was a personal triumph of the elders. Fathers, then were also a serious affair more or less, something to be afraid of and something to be wilfully shunned. They were a powerful, dynamic, hefty lot of masculine genders that kept their better-halves in perpetual subordination and the legacy of this life-long slavery, was in turn passed on to young housewives by the older ones. Mother-in-laws were, (and are !) as a rule, cantankerous by nature, simple and

straightforward; strict and loving, sincere and stupid. The word "education" attached to women was something like a personal slander then. To this, superstition contributed its quota. There were no outings, no trips, no picnics, no week-ends, no changes. They had learnt to live a simple village life, gradually wearing their persons away with ingrained ideas of false self-respect, under the gloomy shadow of a tottering abode. Their, youth, their beauty, their charm had they seen fabricating into wrinkles that have now opened up a woman's revolution.

Thus they, in the sunset of their lives are observing the emancipation of women, and though they may disagree in certain matters, a warm womanly instinct compels them to hold their tongues tight and they blink their sinking eyes involuntarily and look at the changing face of the Indian home with an expectant and circumspect face.

* *
*

19

THE RELATIVES

WE all have so many relatives and it is a pity that most of them are poor. Those of our relatives who are well-placed live in such a secluded world that we often visit them to get ourselves

glamourized by their affluence and splendour. So the rich ones invite us to stupefy us by their exhibition of plenty. This type is rare because there are only a few of this kind. The majority of them are just as common as you and me and probably are worrying about the same things which worry you and me too. So much of their time and our time is wasted in maintaining a home that we see each other per chance or visit reciprocally if there is an accident, or serious illness or death or a dinner! Death and ill-health, want and despair are a common occurrence but a dinner is something really rare and we relish it too much because such occasions are very few and far between. Actually a dinner invitation is something so sweet to remember, that its remembrance is daintier than the dinner itself. Our cousin or our maternal uncle or some such fleshy-mistake becomes our host and is perceptibly perturbed because he is not habituated to entertain people. He behaves awkwardly in his enthusiasm to please all and his sincere efforts to impress upon the guests that his house is as tidy as is purposely made on that occasion, or that the children are as quiet and well-behaved as they appear, or that there is plenty in the house bordering on affluence, or that the ladies have put on their usual dress and some such petty things that are obvious attempts to misrepresent the earning capacity of the host or his ability to spend, is a tragic spectacle. We all subtly play this game of manoeuvring a

financial camouflage to hoodwink our relatives and friends about our regularised poverty but occasions, relatives and guests would be misguided but not that something which haunts the heart and makes one feel a bit guilt-conscious. A poor relative giving an extravagant dinner does it either to repay his obligations or does it through sheer desperation. It is the latent, intense desire to lead a lordly life and entertain a few at his dismal residence and thus secure an escape from a humdrum existence, though only for a day that prompts him to be rash.

Our relatives are inter-related, independent lots that have nothing to do with each other when all is well. There are certain formal ceremonies when they gather together, try to laugh out an evening, show off their best sartorial architecture, travel in a taxi when in reality they cannot even afford a bus, try to be warm-hearted with colder lips and generally make everything possible to impress upon one another that they are happy. They would borrow money with a sort of privilege and if it is refused, because there is nothing to lend, off breaks the contact. Distance and occasional visits have sharpened their sense of self-respect to the point of getting touchy and the slightest provocation or insult foments a life-long acrimony and a consequent severance.

It is good to have a network of relatives spread over distant cities and towns and villages. We

city bugs can then waste our idle hours or our vacation or privilege leave at their cost and can tell ourselves that we have had a change. Such relations should be close enough to welcome us but distant enough not to return the visit! We can take a few yards of shirting for the host, a cheap but gaudy saree for his daughter and a box of city sweetmeats for the kiddies and thus on this meagre investment can secure our boarding and lodging for a considerable time. The host will be pleased because of the city shirting, his daughter would dance with rustic joy because of that saree, the kiddies would be mirth incarnate on account of those sweetmeats, and this diffusion in family of pure happiness will keep the relations quite warm for a good time. While returning, of course, one can thrust a couple of silver coins in the tiniest and tenderest hand of the person in the house and can pretend to vibrate one's parting tone to show one's reluctance to part and one's esteem of their association and then quit with a hasty jerk of one's travelling leather bag if one has it!

I have written in a selfish strain about relatives as I feel that all of them are a selfish lot with a desire to exploit as much as possible of the other fellow, and enjoy as much as possible at his cost. They accentuate our senses of greed and possession and compel our wives to take a comparative view of everything. Often they start quarrels by back-biting and poisonous diplomacy and try to

crash down the unity of the home. There are, of course, a good few whom we assess in the wrong light and who, when circumstances test them, turn out to be the best and help us in our difficulties beyond our expectations. The other category then simply keeps quiet and turns up when the tide is turned and offers its belated hand of assistance. Thus the world of our relations renders a microscopic vision of the broader world and the study of human characters is vividly reflected in its peculiar combination. There are some who would offer a cup of tea at any odd hour and there are others who would see us tremble in cold but wouldn't even talk formally about it - let alone persuasion! There are those who would refuse a ten-rupee note as a loan in the most trying situation and there are those who would readily sell their wife's ornament for the purpose or dispose of their ring. There are some who would often dine heartily with us at our place but who would forget us when we are nearing death. These are the ways of the world and the relatives. A man like me tries to understand them all and overlooks their faults and prejudices, their taunts and malice. We have to get on with them as we do with others around and the excuse of having a relationship shouldn't raise in our minds too many expectations on that account. After all, they are also just normal beings and have their own limitations and I cannot expect them to be particularly

partial towards me as I cannot claim a preferential treatment by virtue of my far-fetched blood-tie or the accidental relative proximity.

* * *

20

THE JOINT FAMILY

IN a land, that is now getting gradually westernized in ideas, thought and action and has already made tremendous strides in blind aping, to pretend to advocate apparently orthodox ideas would appear to be an intellectual anachronism. My writing, therefore, on the joint family system will perhaps be viewed by cynics as a pitiable attempt to cement family relations for the obvious reason of economic considerations. On the face of it, this would seem to be a sound and convincing argument, but I differ. I differ because perhaps, I am not as materialistic as my cynical colleagues are likely to be. I have always been viewing the Indian home and its upshot of a joint family as nothing less than a sacred institution. To perceive cracks of discord in such a holy sanctury is indeed an agony for me. Deep discord and disharmony will there always be as everybody is cantankerous, though in varying degrees, and as human nature has always been and will always be what it was. To de-

abolish the joint family system for fear of discord and strife is an open acknowledgment of defeat at the hands of evil elements within us. If we cannot safeguard ourselves against the frailty of our mind then our forefathers, have distinctly scored a higher victory. We must presume in that case that grown-up brothers of the last generation had a better sense of accommodation and a greater degree of reasonableness. If we flash out the lame excuse of lack of education in them, then certainly it goes against us as, armed with education, we ought to understand each other better, ought to know, human nature better, our own psychology better, our kith and kin better and not smash each other's head because we pretend to be much rationalized. So much the worse for education. Again the fallacy of economic considerations will not work, as our ancestors were economically less unstable than we are at present. As such, a group of modern family would, therefore, attempt to stick together as my cynical friends would think. But this does not appear to be correct. The spiral of economic frailty has reached such dizzy heights, that necessity, if not blood relations, would have succeeded in keeping the family members as a solid homogeneous entity. I repeat, again that the economic spiral vanishes in the dark firmament of quarrels, and internal upheavals and even the bare necessity of maintaining a sub-human existence cannot patch up the rupture in a family.

The sadist father, who, posing himself a modern would, without a definite reason, ask his newly married son, to quit his home for the "enjoyment" of life and the unbridled satisfaction of his carnal instincts, is fortunately rare in this country. The son, the product of this generation may run amok in his youthful exuberance, and crush many an aging heart and it is to this sinister type, I am referring to, He is usually the 'educated', too-wise type, and is a direct menace to the joint family system. His independent propensities are augmented by a modern eve, who to say the least, does not like the two living lumber-room in the persons of her father-in-law and mother-in-law. Many a modern girl is apt to think that the aging parents of her husband should simply die, to make room for complete 'independence', or if 'die' is a harsh term, should live away say at the native place or any where, except in her house which she claims overnight, by virtue of her matrimony. This is disastrous. The charm of a joint family cannot be adequately described. It must be lived through; all members sticking together, enjoying themselves together, laughing together, and crying together. Our ancestors did it and we should do it. "Separation after marriage sad" should be smashed root and branch if the healthy development of the Indian home is to be achieved. Fathers-in-law have become reasonable and mothers-in-law have been toned down. Women-

are getting a better insight in life because of education and such mental advancement of our modern women should be used for establishing a happy, united and joint family and not for crashing it down. The intellectual mother, the modern girl is, can better canalise her mental resources to advantage and if her celestial influence can bind up together three generations, that is her father-in-law and mother-in-law, herself and her husband and thirdly her child, then can it be said that it is a distinct triumph of our Indian home, Indian womanhood and Indian nation.



21

MY DRESS

MY friendly critics must thank me for providing such innocent humour and a butt for laughter through my consistently shabby dress. My face is not my fortune and my dress much more so. Mine is a hastily bundled self in cheap cloth that dares stir out in a fashionable world. In a vast fashion rendezvous, where square-cut shoulders and round cut ones and varied antics of

the tailor play a silky havoc, my presence in a suit that attempts pitifully to correct the mistakes of the tailor and round off my physical abnormalities, is a sartorial anachronism. I do not regret it. Nor do I worry about it. After all the dress is for us and we are not for the dress. I have been criticised severely by my friends and relatives and though I respect both their criticism and suggestions, my shabby habits steer clear of actual execution in a reformatory direction. Disappointed in their attempts to improve my outer appearance, this kindly lot has now given up efforts and should, per chance, they happen to see me well-dressed, in fact, normally tidily dressed, then they are amazed.

I put the blame of loose clothes on my tailor and that for tight ones, on my physical fluctuations. My tailor is skilful in his art and is a popular one on our side, but he blunders in my tailoring. I have seen this happen on many an occasion. Whether it is his fault or my rapid physical changes beat him every time, I cannot definitely say. But the fact remains that they become either too loose or too tight and my shabbiness then scores another triumph. The very few good clothes I possess are then torn by excessive service and it takes time before they are replaced by quite fitting and accurate type. Personally, I do not mind all this. But my wife does. Other members of my family including my mother who is regardless of petty matters, snub me and off I dash to my tailor,

hastily select some cloth that nobody approves and get stitched another suit that is all at variance with my physical requirements. If after sincere efforts to appear decent, I still fail miserably, I leave the dress to itself and forget all about it. I know, people these days spend a lot on clothes. The expenditure on this account has an interesting side-light in that it shows that our fathers spent comparatively less on this item though their purchasing power was better. We, of this generation, squander the money over our decoration with a diminishing purchasing capacity. The inference is that the money spent on dress usually bears an inverse proportion to our earning capacity. I have seen a few blessed gay souls spending more for a single suit than their whole month's income, and flouting and showing off their stupidity in public places of amusements. Though this may not be a representative example, still it will be generally accepted that we are losing more silver on cotton and silk than our fathers or grand-fathers did. For them, dress was happily not a serious proposition as it is with us these days. They had, in fact, a sort of repulsion for covering of any kind and dressed only to respect formalities and observe customs. Their distinct tendency was to pull off as many of their clothes as their self-respect would permit, and while there was a desire in them to uncover their bodies as much as they possibly could, we, on the other hand, fight shy of exposing ourselves.

and hastily cover up our persons, should we happen to be shirtless, when some stranger suddenly comes over to us and we do all that with the haste of a woman ! This dressing and undressing has also a peculiar trait. Those with a stronger physique do not cover themselves up and, in fact, effect a certain delay to facilitate the exhibition of their brawn and weaker the fellow, the greater his haste for hiding his cage of ribs !

I do not, on any account feel an inferiority complex because I manage to maintain an unpleasant appearance and I have on some occasions, seriously retaliated unwarranted criticism in this matter. I do not grudge, when others dress nicely. But when the clothes-minded, well-groomed, hair-combing type interferes in regard to my personal dress, I take him severely to task. I can understand a bit of vanity and am glad to see him strutting on with measured steps and jerking shoulders and all his self-twisting to appear impressive, but I would be glad also if he does not meddle with me. I dress because I must and feel that to wear a shirt, trousers and a coat is the limitation of my social obligations and I am not bound to observe the frivolities in dress with maidenly care and attention. I am aware that a good dress counts in the long run, that it improves one's appearance, and affects imperceptibly our moods. I have given up relying too much on dress for my personal betterment. As

to appearance, I have a habitual negligence and my face and my person are purely at the mercy of my tailor and my whims. As to moods, I can say that if I am dressed too well, my moods are perceptibly affected and I become quite uncomfortable. It is a responsibility to keep up for a considerable time the good work of the washerman, and I feel that I wouldn't be able to shoulder it as splendidly as others would.

Our dress is the hall-mark of our civilization and its index. It reflects the national wealth of a country and a people. It is our individual, sartorial camouflage that attempts on many an occasion, to prevent our miserable exposition. It is our weapon to sharpen our vanity and augment our folly. It is usually the guide to a man's heart and his internal making.

We dress to please others and others dress to please us. Thus we see our ladies tottering off with the best of silken saris which their husbands cannot really afford, and our own selves keeping steps to the ruffle of our only silk-suit. The world of to-day is thus a colossal Vanity Fair wherein men are taking dress as a serious proposition and women, as usual, are taking it as a religion. The tailor, the sucker of our hard-earned money, is attaining a place of importance, in our lives.

I for myself dress because I must and spend over it when I cannot help it. It is always a tech-

nicolour combination of cotton that covers my person and it is always something loose here and something tight there that struggles to effect a compromise with my uncompromising limbs and shows me off as a man, shambling along, eccentrically dressed.

* * *

22

MY EXPECTATIONS

MY expectations of life are reasonable and I am entertaining no illusions about it. By "reasonable", I mean that I am spreading out my vision that would encompass within itself a normal life, a normal diet, a normal amount of clothing and a normal quota of pleasures. A clerical life becomes automatically a dull affair. Out of this rut, I try to snatch up a few leisurely moments, that raise me up in an atmosphere where I breathe heartily, and talk the evening out in intelligent, spicy talk in the company of my friends. I feel certain that I am not that lucky individual on whom Dame Luck would shower her kindly blessings quite unawares, and having convinced myself about that, I have resigned myself to my common Fate and given up strenuous efforts, hurry and excitement. The dull lethargy thus produced, has evolved an unmindful, unique equanimity, akin

to mental stagnation and this, above anything else, has helped me in keeping myself above water. It may appear surprising that I have included diet in my normal expectations, but let me tell you that diet is the very essence of life. Good food develops good feelings and bad food produces the type, the world is so very full of. When I take a hearty meal, I feel more contented than when I read a good book. This may sound unaesthetic and even bordering on stamping myself as a glutton but I don't mind it. A good book may generate within me some thoughts of my own and bother my head. Not so with good food. It spreads out a sweet feeling of approaching sleep and as I lean lower and lower and ultimately spread myself on whatever I chance to be, I plunge deep in a solid slumber or a nap, completely forgetting this sorrowful world my humdrum existence, the outstanding bills, my good-natured boss and all things that fill my life in my wakeful hours. My good food wouldn't consist of delicacies and spices. It would be just enough if I get good, hot rice and something with it. I am trying to temper down the frolics of my tongue and have come down to relish food, hot or cold, fresh or stale, delicate or coarse. If some cynic interprets this apparent triumph as the victory of my eating propensities, I would only say that is not so. Good food can give good moods to anybody. As persons like you and me simply cannot afford to have some

such thing everyday and with difficulty on Sundays, we must, I think, develop a taste for almost anything that is eatable. When one acquires such an ability, one solves half one's problems. If I can be contented with a little rice and curry and a bit of vegetable and if I am certain that I can procure it to the end of my life, I need not worry about my food problem at all. With any fish, I would call my meal a feast. If good meals come my way, well and good! If they don't, it doesn't matter at all. Such an ascetic mentality would render our consuming craving null and void and I am trying hard to acquire the same.

I have written about my dress elsewhere. I do not like to spend on clothes at all. I like to see well-dressed persons, and I like to move in their midst and watch their anxiety over their dress. I am deliberately adding one of the most important items last; that of money. A normal income—that is an income that won't find me on the wrong side at the end of every month, is all that I desire or care for. Of course, the income would cover my reasonable expectations. I am not a person either to crave for a bank balance or one who would accumulate it at the cost of personal sacrifice and inconvenience. What's the use of saving a rupee if one has to lose ten ounces of blood for it? Where's the pleasure in watching the bank-book if we register a good figure therein after foregoing all pleasures and all fun? The miser who imbibes a

glass of cold drink on a hot afternoon, is usually incapable of enjoying the beverage as, with every sip, he thinks that he has wasted a couple of annas and is now short by that amount had it not been for the folly of his tongue! Well! I don't belong to that category. My normal quota of pleasures would include a glass of cold drink on a hot afternoon and should I desire it, I will have it at any cost. A picture off and on, a circus show in a couple of years, a picnic every year, a dinner at somebody's cost, a friend's marriage feast, and some such common things would keep my spirits at the proper level. I never wish to possess charming villas with beautiful gardens around, nor do I desire to have a car. That would be embarrassing. I have observed that almost everywhere the owner of the car gets into it with knitted eyebrows and the proud landlord of the charming villa usually thinks too much about it, and dies of heart-failure as a consequence and haunts the same in some cases. I do not like to wear knitted eye-brows, nor would I like to be an apparition and frighten away women and children from my earthly possession. My humble life, as it is, can shower forth a comforting shower-bath of pure, innocent, aesthetic joy and underneath its fountain do I get drenched, closing my eye-lids in sheer pleasure and meditation. Thus, while the world around struggles and sweats, I remain aloof and watch their frantic efforts to grab money, corner gold and

is how we normally pass our day. Every Sunday we get up a bit late to assert our prerogative that on that day we are the masters of Time and not otherwise. We take an extra cup of tea, when we normally take our food and after marketing and loafing we return, enjoy our slightly less frugal menu, and thereafter roll off, into a cautious, guilt-conscious, clerical nap and wake up at about four to imbibe another cup. The evening sees us on the beach or the gardens and occasionally in the theatre. In all these places of recreation, we spend modestly and make a piteous attempt to enjoy the evening to the full. The sun sets, darkness gathers around us and within us. The cruel fact that yet another Sunday has slipped by and that Monday demands our punctual attendance, creates a despondency on our wan face and brooding over it we go to sleep, counting how far the next Sunday lies. To this particular group, Sunday is but one of those numerous semi-colons to a life-long sentence.

This regularised inertia and an intellectual stagnation are the products of the modern life and because our ways and modes are cast into iron frames of careers, usually inglorious, that we find to our dismay to have a restricted scope to offer a square deal to life. How can a normal fellow fight his way to fame or glory, promotion or rise, when he can definitely tell me, for example, that his salary would be rupees so much after thirteen years? What

a pity to hear somebody telling us in a cold tone where he would be after so many years? Yet that is modern life - a clear mathematical calculation. It is good that the wheels of chance and the eccentricity of Fate, baffle us clean, or, otherwise, somebody could tell me how much would he spend on a particular day after a decade and keep it! Taking things as they are it is difficult to understand how I can fight out my own life. The prime of my youth, like most of you is fettered to an office-stool and the best of the day is wasted in trivial pursuits. The return home is a return of an exhausted man, without news, good or bad, without spirits, jolly or otherwise, the return of an approaching bundle of cracked humanity, seeking refuge in a poor abode. What is it I repeat to myself that would give me consolation and relief and fire me through to do something noble or else emancipate me from commonplace shackles? Nothing! My measured steps would lead me mechanically to the premises that offers me my bread every morning and from it do I emerge in the evening, only to be there again as usual. This cycle of eventless arrival and departure would be punctured when my heart would be punctured; till then I pedal with a grim and savage determination and fight my way in my own way. Everybody here struggles in his peculiar style. Thus the struggle of the king would be different from that of the farmer, that of the

farmer would be different from that of the money-lender, that of the money-lender would be different from that of the lawyer or doctor and that of the lawyer or doctor would be different from that of the clerk. Unfortunately, the struggle of the clerk has some distinct peculiarities. His life, usually is as full of cares as the king's is though in a different sense, his intellectual toil is heavier than the physical one of the farmer's, his monetary anxiety would beat that of the money-lender's, his tongue would be as slavish as that of the merchant's, and his life would be as uneasy as that of the doctor's and lawyer's combined! The clerical vocation has thus picked up all the dishonourable traits from several other honourable professions, and I am telling you to fight the matter through! It is so easy to write, so difficult to execute!

I for myself feel that efforts should help one's Fate and Fate should co-operate with our efforts. We, as normal men of the world can put up a limited resistance and in fact, choose the line of least resistance. This royal road to happiness does not yield spectacular results. On the other hand, there are a few industrious diehards, who are restless like a child, move here and move there and are usually no better than what they were formerly! Those are the unlucky and unfortunate type and they are all around us. The world is full of them. They have given their battle, but have run short of the ammunition of Luck and had to effect an unconditional

surrender and have now resigned themselves to Fate. I would use the kick within me quite sparingly. If I succeed, well and good! If I don't, and I usually don't, I pretend to convince myself that better chances are still to come, that the real fight is still ahead and that it was wise of me not to have exhausted myself so soon! Clean personal deception you see, but knowing it well, have I felt a sort of solace. New chances have since cropp'd up, new strength have I mustered on those occasions, and new failures have I suffered times out of number. Yet, with every fall have I risen again with a spirit of vengeance to get the better of my ill-luck. Fresh frustrations have developed fresh powers within me and on confronting novel chances I have waged a terrific battle, all in vain. These heart-rending falls have made me a dogged fighter. Somewhere in the core of my heart, there lurks a hope that I would improve my position appreciably enough to have a few little things like a good library, a cricket set, a radiogram and a few good periodicals but not well enough to lose the value of money and the charm of lower middle-class want. Should money be so easy, that one gets what he wants within an hour of his ringing some costly dealer, where's the fun in all that? If I accumulate a good library, I would appreciate its value well and fondle the shiny outer covers of the books, the same way I spread my fingers over a baby's cheeks... I would hit my own ball with dis-

creation and wouldn't go in for a sixer for fear of losing it. I would tune my radiogram with care and wouldn't lend my periodicals as freely as I do now.. Thus do I fight life in my feeble way; hang my head down in shame but for a while on every failure and raise it up again, swearing an oath to be more tenacious next time and roam about and talk of it and when a new phase opens itself, I close it because of my folly and inaptitude ! ..

* *
*

24

FIGHT LIFE LAZILY

I fight life lazily. I am squaring my accounts with it almost half-heartedly. I am pushing on in a dead-alive manner. This indolent struggle has its advantages, all the same. I always feel fresh and equal to any emergency because I have 'not' and will not draw too much on the funds of my sustaining capacity and martial ability. The result is that there is always some reserve force of these qualities within me and they help me to maintain my mental equilibrium to an appreciable degree. I have also started my life with a pessimistic assumption that life is a succession of unpleasant events, consuming failures and bitter disappointments. Let me remind you that I have mentioned

somewhere that I am an indomitable optimist but I have found that it is extremely convenient to be pessimistic on some occasions.' Normal persons like you and me should always count upon the fact that something untoward or unthought of thing is going to crop up at the eleventh hour and disrupt all our plans. If something does turn up, we get the advantage of having been mentally fortified against this onslaught which to us then appears expected and thus we are able to get on with falls as lightly as we could wish. If a man develops a supreme feeling that he is regardless of everything, he would be a lucky man. I would like to have that mentality. If he gets a good amount of unexpected money, he should normally rejoice but shouldn't dance of ecstacy and should he lose it all, as suddenly as it came, he shouldn't weep but wear a little worried expression. All that is pardonable. It is too much to expect, for example, a common person like me, exercising full control over his sentiments and emotions. That is too much, really. I would be a victim of human feelings, hopes and aspirations. I cannot pretend to be ascetic in my ways and means. Far from that. My desire to have an ascetic mentality is but mere wishful thinking. That would help me to suffer the rigour of this life and the strain of this perennial work! Fighting life lazily is an art and mediocres like me have achieved it through the automatic.

process of consistent retrogression. When a man becomes unmindful of materialistic achievements, takes everything easy, never worries about anything, faces things as they are and fights life lazily, I would wonder what sort of a man he would be! He would be my ideal hero and I would worship him with all my heart.

I know the case of a well-educated artist, who poked his artistic nose here and there and bled because he got too many punches on it, but bled smilingly. He had a beautiful wife and charming children. He himself was a very fine fellow with everything of a gentleman in him. He was a man of ideas, brain and schemes. The only trouble was that there was no money to put all his ingenious schemes into realities and they melted all into a volatile poverty. The poor fellow did odd jobs and managed to gather a few chips here and there and wasted his days and nights outside his family more through a sense of shame born out of his financial impotence than through real work. His kindly parents maintained his family. Five years of hard life saw him nowhere near a job. He was pushed out by all and sundry. He never baffled. Out would he trip in the morning, wish me a "good morning" and part as if all was well with him. Often have I seen him idling his time in a Restaurant over a cup of tea for which his friend paid and he smoked with that confidence and ease that glorifies the dignity of a born artist and

he was one. Never had I seen him with a morose expression or a sore face. I wondered how lightly he was taking everything. The sixth year has now given him a job that would pay him a thousand rupees a month ! I see him again, in the same Restaurant and with the same friends, happily engaged as before over a cup of tea and cigars and I hear that now he pays for that tea ! The same care - free expression radiates his face and the same happy-go-lucky strides see him out every morning. I feel that he has sought lazily. I would not be surprised if he would behave, as he behaves now, should he lose that job.

I remember that when on losing an excellent chance, a friend who was unaware of the sad result had asked me about it, I had replied in such a jolly mood that he thought that I was fooling him. I was not fooling him. My Fate had fooled me again but I had pulled myself up sufficiently to belittle the affair. If common men like you and me go on pining, we would die sooner than is normally destined and thus gain nothing by pining and also lose whatever little we could enjoy. The slackness in our efforts is the real testimony of our exhaustion and is, therefore, a pardonable weakness.

I fight my life lazily as I am well aware that after all, our goals and objectives are, if viewed in a proper and comparative perspective, so very poor that they do not deserve all out efforts, energy and

strain: "If, with a little investment of action, I stand to gain something, it is all right." If not, I leave the matter alone and do not regret that I have failed to gain it. Thus, to a certain extent, I have developed the quality of taking nothing seriously to heart. This world, we all know, is a huge race-course and there are many that weep and only a few that feel happy, though temporarily. I, therefore, count every fresh retreat as just another set-back and a strategic one and strive to fortify my position, and fortify it leisurely. The lightning of chances illuminates the dark firmaments of your lives and mine off and on and by the time we recover from its stupefying brilliance, all is dark again. It is here that I strive to kindle with the help of the flint-stone of my buoyant attitude a feeble light of a retiring comfort, solace and consolation in my heart, and pass my days, looking out of the window, indulging in a little introspection, watching the children play and wondering at the immensity of life! The whole panorama of Life then appears a compact living scene wherein men, women and children, all plod on and on, the reluctant cattle give the milk, the seas swell and recede, the rivers flood and dry, the streams hum a whispering lullaby, the Nature looks serene, the mountains sleep peacefully and snore through beasts, and my lethargic mind conceives that they all do it lazily!"

25

THE MISFITS IN LIFE

I believe that I am a misfit in life. Not that I consider myself to be someone quite peculiar from others. Not No!! Not that!!! My point is, my present vocation doesn't quite suit my temperament and I experience considerable difficulty in moulding my person to suit the requirements of that inglorious pursuit. Some of you might just wonder as to why this wise-acre doesn't pull himself out completely and fix himself into what he yearns for or craves about. I would but say helplessly, I can't. If I could, I would. I am aware that this is the state of many a normal individual like me. They make a masterly effort to relieve their position and are hammered out into disgruntled have-nots, with a bitter Saturnine disposition and a wry face. They are the mis-fits in life. An eccentric combination of incalculable events throws such unfortunates into the wild fire of a commercial inferno and time scorches their vigour, youth and vision. Their illusions are shattered, their dreams turn into mirages, and their hopes die unfulfilled. In all this emotional slaughter, the victim suffers for no other fault of his than that he is a mis-fit. Imagine a very good artist doing welding, shaping or oiling work in a giant factory, situate in the slums of the city. Imagine a musician or a singer producing in

mass, bomb-cases or cartridge-caps or cutting steel plates in a maddening din of machines. Imagine a poet as the clerk of a rich merchant, muttering and calculating, adding and subtracting, shaky figures that sing the glory of silver with one voice, and smother his poetic fervour beneath their sheer inky weight. Imagine an architect working as a mere road-supervisor, a sculptor as the head of a demolishing squad, a doctor as an examiner of cattle before slaughter and a dancer as a jail-warder walking with measured steps with a rifle on his shoulder, showing off a spitefully shining bayonet. Imagine a good actor working as a compounder in some obscure corner of a congested by-lane. Imagine an actress as a nurse or a house-maid, serving all and helping to relieve the sufferings of all around. Those are, I repeat, the mis-fits. Their orange hue of artistic temperament is blended into a deep dark of reality and we get an unpleasant combination.

The good painter wielding his brush and palette with a steadfast poise should be excused if his welding is not upto the mark, if his shaping is out of shape as compared with that of his colleagues or if his oiling doesn't ooze into all parts of the devil machine. You gentle reader, I am sure, you would excuse him. I would excuse him too, but not his foreman and he would be severely collared verbally. The foreman doesn't need his pictures. They are to him a waste of good paint that should have been used for oil-paint-

ing the factory premises or his room ! He wouldn't care a jot if he burns his paintings in despair as long as his welding is all right, his shaping symmetrical, and his oiling perfect. The musician should better get dumb and produce bomb-cases, cartridge-caps and well-cut steel-plates that would be cast into roaring guns and thus help to manipulate steel and iron into eloquent gestures of national might that would do yet another sportive bid to rescue civilization, territorial boundaries, League of Nations and pacifist organizations from utter rotting inertia ! His vocal performance would be regarded as a stupid expression of womanly emotions and weaknesses to a modern world, which has habituated itself to utilize the divine gift of music for composing explosive compositions as would shatter its peace and security and rock it with mad martial fury ! That musician should better hold his tongue and sing in bath-room a hurried apology that would denounce the empty bomb-cases, cartridge-caps and steel-plates. The aesthetic clerk should bottle his intellectual somersaults, and work out the sums with the accuracy of a cold Comptometer and let the world go by. His noble thoughts and his suppressed ambition should he barter for a petty salary. He should compress the expanse of the world in the nut-shell of his desk and drown his dreamy visions in the inkpot on that fateful table. His pen should be muzzled to his work and should not indulge in an illicit connection with his brain.

even after office hours. His clerical dashes of hopes, joys, desires and expectations should he blot out once for all and let himself go by as disinterestedly as he can. His aesthetic manoeuvres are of no consequence to the dry figures lie works out and his boss wouldn't mind him chatter a lot about politics and war, Life and Death, Theosophy and Religion, as long as his statements of accounts are properly filled in or his accounts, properly maintained. The scheming architect should drown his disappointments in a cup of tea, prepared on the fire of unaccepted blue-prints and supervise road construction and shout himself hoarse like an ordinary labourer, waving flags red and green. The sculptor shouldn't dream of chiselling out lively images out of a dead stone but pursue the easier way of demolishing old houses and be the head of a demolishing squad by virtue of his special qualifications as a sculptor and watch the crumbling of cement and mortar, piping happily at a distance. The altruistic doctor shouldn't worry about dying patients, may attach his stethoscope to his bath-room tap and make straight for the slaughter house where his sensitive hands can pick out bad, diseased, cattle and there would he pass his time reading a book on "Cattle-breeding". The dancer should convert his physical agility into beastly ferocity and become a jail-warder and strike terror into the hearts of the inmates. The actor should better act in the real drama of life where not his acting fall-

ent, but fighting ability shall be tested. As if afraid to undergo such a rigorous test and being doubtful whether the stare alone could give an humble living, should he take refuge in a modern dispensary in some secluded nook of a slum and act himself to distraction. The actress shouldn't move a throng before the stage by her artificial tears. She should be forced to be a nurse, or a bar-maid or a house-maid and see the suffering of humanity with her own eyes and then drop a real drop of tear to comfort herself. These, Sir, are all the mis-fits in life. There are a score of examples. I wouldn't enumerate all. There are others which the writer of these lines cannot even conceive. The worldly life thus sways to and fro, fights shy of picking up the right persons for the right jobs, murmurs that they are shirkers or slacks, and gives them a ruthless punishment by keeping them as non-entities, and thus contributes its maximum share for making this place as unpleasant for all of us to dwell upon as is required by tradition and facts !

26

MISFITS GLORIFY LIFE

IT is because this world is a colossal workshop wherein misfits are yielding a reluctant labour that they have infused a tragic glory in life all unawares. Square logs in round wholes are found in all professions and I would neither blame the professions nor the square, unfortunate logs, but I would only say "Bad luck". The human efforts, like anything else, has also a bar of limitation and a normal person is likely to be completely down-hearted after his initial struggle has gone in vain. How many intelligent clerks do I see around me who can talk interestingly on varied subjects, have developed themselves far above the selfish ethics of a business-man, and who deserve therefore a better treatment from this commercial life than is rendered to them? Education and reading have given them the back-ground to evolve a cultured mind and their daily meetings in the tiffin-rooms have sharpened their wit and revised and supplemented their knowledge. Against this clean, intellectual back-ground looms the sinister shadow of a full day's work and what work? Those intellectual misfits have glorified the clerical profession by gracing those ungrateful offices and life has taken a full revenge, as it were, by keeping at the top, a boss, who, on some occasions wouldn't even

deserve the post of a clerk? As I look in wider fields, this wrong intention of per manū, always meets my eye and I feel that now it has almost become a way with this world. A half-bredged doctor would be a hospital assistant; a lawyer, who normally should flounder in Law Courts, clings hard to some desk and fills forms all through the day. Isn't it a pity to observe that humble legal luminary court-martial his legal knowledge before his clerical desk and cara at the end of the month what he should have within a day? That is a tragic misfit, and life exacts such wonderful combinations that they thrill one's heart and send down a shudder through the spines. All of them appear to be, but children who attended the wrong schools, passed the wrong examinations in colleges, chose the wrong careers and have now glorified life by their eccentric occupations and twisted philosophies. Their ideas and ideals, their dreams and visions, their ambitions and aspirations are but sporadic upheavals and is an insignificant ruffle in the stormy sea of life.

I know very well a fellow who is really very good at mimicry. He doesn't stoop so low as to imitate cats and dogs and some such odd things. He dives into life itself, and caricatures it after his own inimitable fashion. I like his mimicry. He has selected a few important professionals from our lives like the money-lender whom we approach when our co-operative societies cannot stand our

THUS I LIVE

drain on its slender resources, the astrologer or the palmist whom we consult with reverential awe, submitting ourselves at his supernatural art and imagining that he alone would salvage us from the wreck, the drunkard whom we all shun but secretly hope for a peg on a cold day and such common characters that fill the earth. His mimicry is so life-like, his humour and wit is so pungent and real that the whole house roars with delight. When I see him at his best moulding the moods of the audience at his will, I feel that I should have had that art. But then I remember what daily work has he to do and I tremble. He has to do a job, which the champion of sadist wouldn't have thought of. He has to take the temperature of rabbits before they are given to poisonous snakes as prey, in a snake-bite curing institute and at other times has to wait upon as a laboratory assistant and watch the eminent researchers, fill and empty glass tubes and flasks with repulsive liquids of all shades. When I visualize that comedian doing that nauseating job, I can but wonder at the magnificent paradox and bow my head in abject submission to the terrific forces that life emanates.

I would not name him for fear of hurting that reverential respect which I entertain for that dynamic dramatist, but I would venture to mention here just a paragraph from his unfortunate life. In his time and still to this day his excellence

in Marathi language has not been surpassed by anybody—nay there hasn't been even a remote likeness to his resplendent flash of pen. His works were not appreciated when they were published and dramatised because the public then was incapable of assimilating his powerful thoughts and language. Twenty-five years later the masses got a bit enlightened and arranged a marvellous programme to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his young death. Speeches glorifying his person and pen were delivered from various platforms, his dramas were acted on the stage and the air around was vibrating with his name. That divine dramatist, author and poet who dictated the last chapter of his last drama just fifteen minutes before his death on his death-bed and thus died the death of a real penman had scarcely dreamt that a day would dawn, when a full province would mourn for him, garland him, eulogise him and offer a posthumous award of vocal and sincere felicitations. And now for the paradox, gentle reader. While all that celebration was going on in full swing, while all the audience was clapping and shouting, while his lyrical compositions were being recited by young damsels in well-lit spacious halls, while the people were enjoying and marvelling at some of the idiosyncracies of the great author that were narrated by some contemporary of his, there was labouring in the dingy winding department of a certain city-mill, his own

wife. Cruel! Horrible! Heinous! Yes, gentle reader, it is cruel, horrible and heinous. Yet that is life and that is its glory. Reality and life is a limitless expanse of a multi-coloured landscape and you and I are simply incapable of exploring it. The man who says that he has understood "Life" would be regarded by me as an apprentice in that line. As for me, I try to follow what it is and when my normal thinking capacity leads me no further or no where, I roll myself off or go to a picture and drown the active fury of useless introspection. The misfits in life is its fundamental basis as it were and the glory and charm, the tragedy and sorrow, the discontentment and wrath, the pride and prejudice, and all funny human emotions are the spokes of a gigantic wheel of life that rotates with the earth, the Sun, the Moon and all the stellar system and leave us all clinging to it as mere passive participants or helpless tools in the powerful hands of somebody from whom we cannot rescue ourselves, and live away our time because we must!

* *
*

27

THE CREAM OF LIFE

The cream of life is the cream of happiness we all are struggling for. We have built up so machinery and invented so many ingenious devices of



Our work-shop in the top-floor is the deciding factor
in this worldly struggle.....(P. 17)

generating comfort that all their mathematical precision has precisely failed to achieve the object. The reason is obvious. Life is a natural process and is very sensitive of the unnatural machine, whose contact it shuns and abhors. By evolving a machine age and making a mess of this world by producing too many ugly scientific instruments man has side-tracked the main issue of making his existence happy here and his lust for invention and complication has been so very intense that in his enthusiasm to further civilization and science, he confused everything and passed on to the next generation his wire-drawn legacy. Any machine appears to me as a means for production only and therefore in a modern world has become the means for survival. Its cold heart beats with scientific accuracy and what man has contrived for the well-being of mankind is itself consuming the cream of life. It may be that a person with a mechanical bend may find the soft rhapsody of a musical concert in the horrible din of a mill. But I am leaving that machine-man to himself, oiling the machine and gazing at it as if it were a thing sublime. My abhorrence about them is an instinctive and temperamental abhorrence and I feel that the grinding, pounding machine has made machine of the man and blasted out of him all tender elements of sweetness and leisure, through and through. I also feel that man is developing that destructive tend-

ency to become the slave of that repulsive steel structure in preference to his own self, physical and spiritual. The machine era has thus been the virtual death-knell of pure human happiness. Into this machine-torn world, you and I have been thrown with a reckless disregard for our personal welfare and the problem is how to lick the cream of life, when the cream is so scarce.

It is awfully good that all men have to retire and rest, or else this globe-wide commercial tornado would have swept us out of our beds and planted us right before those spiteful factories. When I see our huge factories, throbbing mills, piercing the beautiful sky with a punny pinnacle of bricks and mortar, and our workshops with iron fencings and a net of electric wires, I feel that these institutions are good in themselves but their wielders are wielding all their might to disrupt our simple, straight life. The banks are overflowing with crores of rupees and filling their coffers with the help of a studied investing system. They print half yearly a stunning balance sheet and yet when one sees the people moving out of its premises and in, one sees a procession of sunken cheeks, wandering eyes and unsteady legs, trotting helter skelter on the smooth floor. The imposing balance sheet is all right for the guidance of the Directors or Managers. How much has the common man gained thereby? What amount of happiness has he purchased or extracted out of

this jumble of mad figures? The mills have turned out millions of yards of cloth and the mechanic who saw it all, watched it with soiled and torn clothes! Have you seen the son of the electrician or wire-man who are dabbling with hundreds of thousands of bulbs in their workshop-stores, being denied both bulbs and electricity because they couldn't afford it? The factory may produce a few thousand soap-bars every day, but have you seen the kiddies of the factory-workers cling too dearly to mother Earth and the mother Earth imprinting too many dusty kisses on them as a consequence?

My point is, what is the good of all this production if the majority of the people have to go without it? The motor mechanic who has to walk a couple of miles to reach what he calls his home cannot naturally be expected to speak highly of a thumping Rolls Royce. I for myself, feel an instinctive sympathy for any man who has to work a machine. By jove! It is so stupid! If I had the misfortune to labour with a machine, I would have bolted away and would have even taken to journalism instead! The net result has been that man has invented intricate machines and therefore his problem of creating happiness has become more intricate. The machine has brought forth commercialism and commercialism has smashed the backbone of the idealist, the dreamer, the artist and the aes-

thete. To me it appears that should a man absolve himself daily from the titanic clutches of mere machines or a humdrum existence and soar high up on a higher intellectual level and be able to brood contentedly and be content by such celestial brooding, then has he a better chance of getting the better of all odds against him. Well, I mean; he has to train himself more or less to get a sort of temporary escape and then attempt to create a little interest in his life in the way he thinks best. He then finishes off his job quickly next day, anxious as he is to be nearer that moment of escape! How fondly do I gaze at the red numbers of Sundays and what a sense of relief Saturday afternoons bring? That proves only one thing. We don't want to work as much as we pretend to show but would like to relish heartily the cream of life as long as we can. As it is, it is becoming a tough proposition. The man on the lowest rung of the ladder is unhappy because he is struggling all the while to get on, while the man at the top is much more so because he is precariously perched and is afraid that a single error of judgment would push him down to disgrace. The poor are unhappy because they are poor, the rich are much more so because of emotional complications and their financial worries are as great as those of the poor, though in a different sense. The middle-class fellow is unhappy, because he dreams of wealth and imagines himself a nobody. Thus everybody thinks that he

is unhappy, also presumes that Mr. So and So must be a happy fellow because of such and such a reason. The Mr. So and So, in turn, talks in the tone of Mr. Everybody and this is an endless chain. If this is so, is it not a folly to take a comparative view in life of everything and pine and waste ourselves to death?

I eat the cream of life as often as I can. I have stopped taking comparative views. I have almost given up day-dreaming as this crooked world is not a fit place for such a happy pastime. I have learnt to be at ease in threadbare suits. My irregularly unshaved face doesn't worry me at all in clean-shaved company. My empty coat-pockets do not flutter through shame when I chance to be in the midst of rich fellows. No person does ordinarily infuse that embarrassing sentiment of inferiority complex within me and I remain what I am, in anybody's presence. The people around talk too much about themselves, their sicknesses, their debts, their predicaments. I listen and talk myself out on those popular themes. Thus, worrying while living and living while worrying, I manage to steal a little cream of life, gulp it down as clean as I can and mark time for the next opportunity, in a threadbare suit with empty pockets and an unkempt, ill-shaven face that looks around and wonders what would happen next!

28

ENJOYMENT

I think that happiness is not necessarily bound up with enjoyment; as ideas of enjoyments differ as much as the ideas of happiness. I can be happy when I do not enjoy and enjoy when I am not happy. For me they are things apart, and though they have a likeness of twin brothers in them, yet I can distinguish between them, though with difficulty. I differentiate between the two because while enjoyment implies a gratification of the senses, happiness touches the nobler chords of the soul.

But let me not bring Soul in the picture and write on a heavy subject and bother you unnecessarily. When an epicurean philosophy is enveloping the globe and spoiling us all, it would be unfashionable to write about Soul and mind and some such clumsy things which the modern mechanic doesn't worry about. Enjoyment is a cheaper recreation for the lesser element of the soul, the physique, and as such is easy to attain because money can buy it. You and I are so severely crushed in this new era, that we do require some massage of relaxation. The pity is that you and I pretend to enjoy not for the sake of enjoyment but to seek an escape—a temporary escape. And when the show is over, we return with the sad remembrance that so much money has been lost or squandered.

What more, some people can't forget, while actually enjoying the show that they have *paid* for it! What a sinister recollection and what a cynical adhesion to wealth? Yes, that is what some people are like and I am afraid that they can neither be happy nor would they enjoy life in any period of their lives. They would be just the "bank-boys" or rent-collectors and die with one hand on their safes, the other on their Pass-books, and their eyes fixed on the stiff envelopes of Insurance policies. God forgive them! Let them visit this earth again then as squanderers, loafers—and merry-makers. Then would they know how much of life they had missed!

We all miss so much fun from life because our lives are so very commonplace and humdrum, because our purchasing power is so very poor, that should we pine for what we can't possess or enjoy, we would invite trouble at its best. I simply forgot the fun I cannot buy, and never regret that I have done so. After all, I must make the best of what I have, exploit every situation in furthering that laudable object of creating happiness, enjoy when I can and then rush back to my work with a zeal born out of that escape. I work and enjoy in my own personal way. The point is, one has to set a limit beyond which one should, on no account trespass and so long as one spins in that personal orbit, one can derive as much bliss as one's capacity can extract. Life is an insolvent debtor and we who are practically bank-

rupt creditors have to make our recoveries of pleasure with skilful manoeuvres and aesthetic discretion. It is no use specifying the kinds of enjoyments. What is enjoyment to one is a bore-some affair for the other. I cannot even bear the idea of visiting the cinema-theatre once a week, as one of my friend does. He wouldn't on the other hand appreciate my occasional visit there and detest my tendency to gather a few friends around and laugh the evening away in the midst of cheap cigarette smoke and the rattle of cups and saucers.

We are craving for enjoying ourselves because life, these days, has become a sort of mathematical problem which we are all striving to solve, which we cannot, and then baffled by its complexity, divert ourselves to lighter occupations, we call enjoyment and fun. It is because of this that we go, say to a circus with our wives and kiddies, hazard good seats at the imminent hazard of being out of pocket for that month, laugh with the clown at his foolish antics, look wide-eyed at the lions and tigers and return to "civilization" after a couple of hours jungle-show, that is return to dismal quarters in whose vicinities curs bark and growl and children cry at the top-note. The transfer scene is amazingly depressing. Haven't you experienced a queer, almost tragic feeling after seeing an emotional drama or a thrilling picture? I have. I think it is the sub-conscious reaction of a groping and agile mind that finds a vivid

representation of its aspirations on the stage or the screen and our incapacity and helplessness to assert our own selves in that luminous way having been utterly brought home to us, we sink in a melancholy mood and hang our heads over our chests. My point is, even our so called enjoyment becomes so very corrupt that its purest exposition doesn't usually succeed in sterilizing ourselves of a deep-set tar of a despondent back-ground that permanently besmears our clean minds. That bleak back-ground is the off spring of the consumptive mother of a poor economic back-ground. Our graded life is a pitiable spectacle of regularised poverty wherein we intermittently gather ourselves to enjoy a good evening, a good show or a good dinner. Apart from the fastidious shackles of conventions and fashions, a mere change in our eventless days, perturbs us all, and often, instead of enjoying we crave to go away from it and seek refuge in the office, or factory or the workshop. It is because we have developed a slavish affinity for our infamous pursuits and have converted ourselves into a body of mechanised army of human machines, that the enjoyment problem has become so very artificial and colourless. How rarely do I hear the true merry ring of laughter ? Often our laughter is forced out as a compulsory obligation and our smiles are usually not sunny and charming, but an half-stifled twitch of the lips that is neither a smile nor a snarl but a commercial brand made

your daily life shouldn't then appear to you or I, a rut. There is an evening every day and daily there is a sunset. I would watch the sunset and as the sun would drown itself in the sea, would I try to drown my worries and cares along with it and then return home. Enjoyment, after all, is the main lubricant for this mechanical life of ours and if we do not lubricate it regularly, the machine would be clogged, the wheels would stop and a severe crack would render it dead stop. I lubricate my life with enjoyment, pure and simple, and I am sure you do it in your own way. I know that life as it is, is quite unbearable and I have to make it tolerable with my own efforts and skill. It has to be given a square deal and has to be moulded to suit our purpose at least in some respects like these. To an untrusted and staunch fighter life holds no terrors and in fact, welcomes him to its majestic palace and leaves him alone to enjoy at will like a generous host. I do not know whether I would be lucky enough to enjoy such a latitude but whatever it is I am determined to have a good time throughout my existence here and not even an avalanche of misfortunes would deter me from pursuing this sweet course. I take enjoyment as a duty.



HOW MUCH WORK, SIR ?

WE all work. That is all right. But the point is, when should we stop ? How much should we work and how much would we like to work ? Whether we like it or not, how much do we actually turn out ? Are we paid in proportion to our labour ?

What I think is that this queer commercial world has laid down some specific rules. The work usually diminishes in proportion to the salary and the salary diminishes in proportion to the work. One may work like a donkey for ten hours and at the end of the month earn less than can be imagined. The whole world has become a workshop and we all are toilers in it. Regardless of our health and care, we have dedicated ourselves to the fulfilment of our jobs and thus drag ourselves on.

The pity of the modern life has been that it is so very exacting and arduous, its rewards and returns are indeed so miserable and poor, that one wonders why it is that mortals have such an intense love of life, and cling fast to it with a pathetic fixity when all round is work, more work and still more work ? Our surroundings are sufficiently squalid to dishearten us about a happy existence here, then why is it that we whitewash our walls, our follies and faults ? In a pensive mood, I often reflect what is it that I live for ? The utter futility

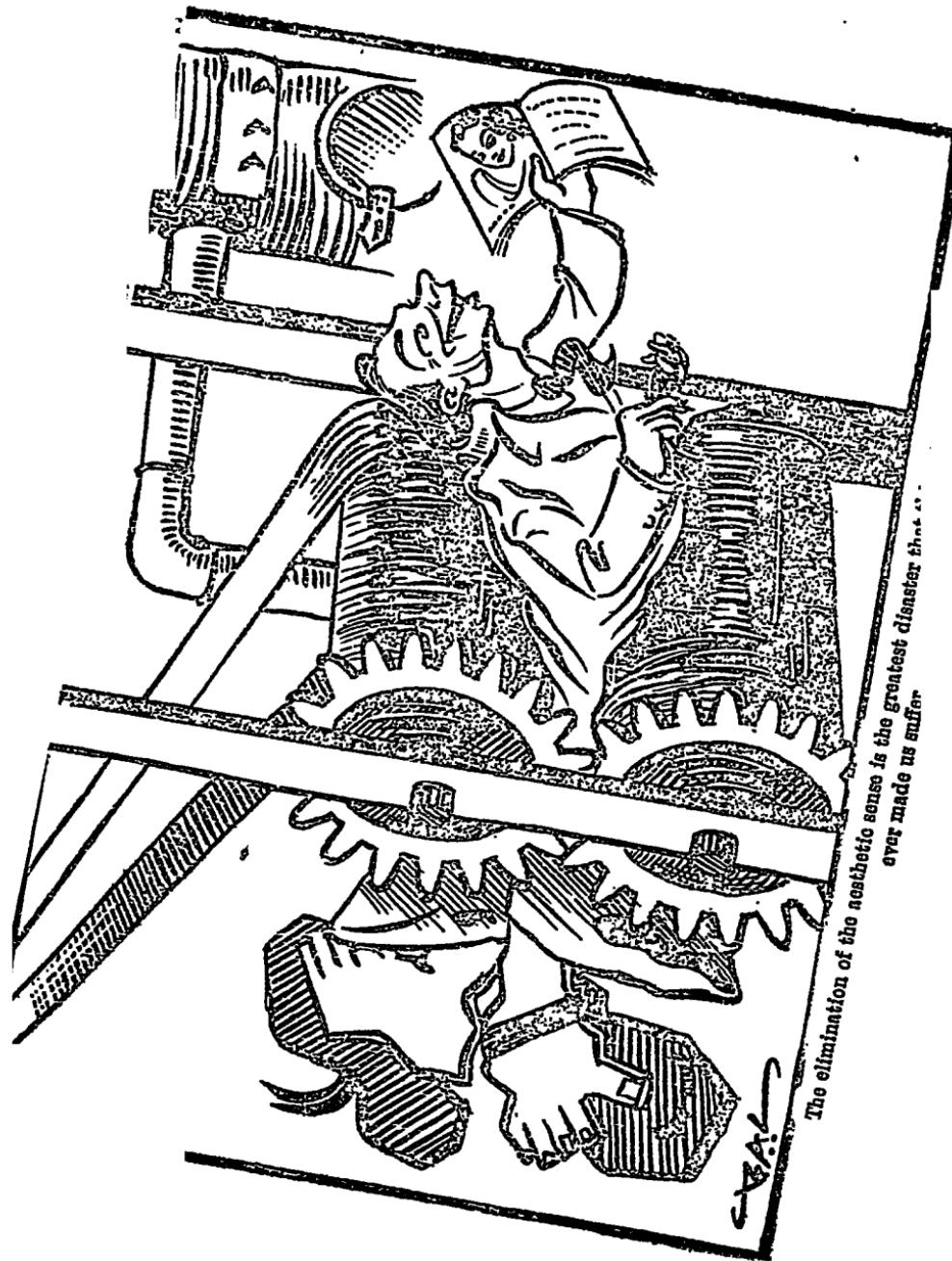
of my normal existence strikes home and I wonder what I and we all are up against. Labour for man and labour for woman is an ancient division of labour but the modern eve has beaten the modern Adam by undertaking and executing both! I am not detesting work. I would like to shirk it after I have done my maximum. The trouble is, you and I cannot shirk and the more we shirk, the more does it bang on our heads like a boomerang. My complaint about work is that we have been compelled to agree to an unconditional surrender by it, and like prisoners of war, are toiling for an indefinite period, daily. Thus your return home is the return of an overworked wreck who would smile faintly as your infirm, ill-clad partner would open the door for you and look at you with an expectant, hopeful face, almost eager every day to hear some good news from you, while you would be just pulling out your clothes with the last ounces of energy in the light of a feeble light, your shadow dancing across the room with a ghostly inertia. Your child would pull your pant and flutter at your feet, raise his tiny hands so that you should pick him up, while you muster up your last vestige of grit and lift him up on your tired limbs, your wife blissfully delighting at this innocent, daily programme of paternal love which deeply gratifies her maternal instincts!. You then have your dinner—a simple affair and I wouldn't like to make this item complicated by naming the

constituents of your scanty meal. Then you sit out in your balcony if you have one and your wife sits near by. You are too tired to chatter. You look at the sky and see it cut by shooting structures and ominous looking pipes, but the constellation of stars above shimmers with a heavenly twinkle and your tired mind gets a little relief. You see the semblance of the moon somewhere, watch the naughty clouds eclipse it clean, then see it reappear, then cast an occasional glance at your sleeping baby and gather yourself to have a good talk with your wife. The good lady listens to your petty achievements, such as how you had a cup of tea and cakes at the cost of somebody else, how your boss wished you "Good morning" and how all your colleagues were simply amazed at that phenomenon. The poor thing listens with rapt attention to all this trivial trash and laughs to signify her approbation and you feel happy. The too punctual wall-clock that probably has been given to you as a marriage-gift by a friend or a group of friends, strikes the retiring hour and you and your wife stretch yourself on a coarse bed with the child in between and while you involuntarily close your eyelids through fatigue, your wife tells her own little victories over the neighbouring women, how she shelled out a pungent taunt to Mrs. so-and-so and how yet another Misses got enamoured of their baby and how the third one gave him a chocolate! You are now nearing the sweet, and almost narco-

tic sleep of an exhausted coolly and slowly her words become inaudible and your person is plunged into an abysmal realm of inaction, remembering faintly in that process that yet another hard day's work lies tomorrow!

How much work, Sir? Really, how much? That has been our life, yours and mine. Our wakeful hours are harnessed to something which usually we detest and thus does life waste away. We finish the day's work as quickly as possible to return home and return home but to return to our occupations the next morning. Somewhere during the course of the day we remember our family and yearn to quit early. We have been the slaves of work and our slavery is going to last almost life-long. Only the old "age" might give us some relief from this turmoil and that for no humanitarian reason or consideration but because we are useless to our office or workshop or factory. So boring has been this life that often have I dreamt of becoming an old man or rather a retired man and read books and take a walk in the evening and play with my grand-children. If a young man is prepared or if not exactly prepared, if he even thinks of bartering his youth to old age for the simple reason of securing an escape from this work and strife, I would only say that that is the bitterest testimony as would magnificently describe the sheer dreariness and sufferings of modern modes and conditions. A young man may say

such things in despair but how horrible it is even to think in this fashion? Robust, dashing youths are not looking square at life but are looking away from it almost in shameful embarrassment, with tiny chests and hollow eyes! The work, too much work has corroded from within his youthful frame, has bent the stiff staff of his spine, has snatched away the light from his eyes and the smile from his lips! That is work. I am indolent by temperament and am not preaching loafing and whistling. My point is modern life is demanding too much from us and we are giving also too much as we can't help it. We cannot visualize any emancipation from this thraldom, any relief from this perennial, gruelling task. As with Fate, we have resigned ourselves to our work as well and have made a religion of it. The Gods may cruise in golden chariots, with angelic fairies around and walk through the lovely gardens of paradise where mango trees are bent with the weight of mangoes and no beastly watch-man rushes out from nowhere to strike the Gods, should they be pleased to pluck out one, but those are not the Gods of the world these days. Our machines are our Gods, and our banks are our Goddesses. We worship them reluctantly in their sinister temples and offer them the garlands of our youthful lives. Our babies die for want of costly medical relief and we offer those sweet young flowers unto their feet. Our wives linger and wait and watch



The elimination of the aesthetic sense is the greatest disaster that ever made us suffer

our home-ward return in rustic balconies and apologetic windows while the smoke in the kitchens curls up and up and we offer that incense to modern Gods. Wouldn't they be pleased by such incense of the factories and workshops and kitchens? We give all that we can and sacrifice beyond our capacity. Days pass by, clocks goad us to our work and we quite serenely take our chairs or stand and rolling up the sleeves square the account for that day. In the small hours of the approaching night, we beg to return and walk limply, with something in our hands — say, a little fish that we purchase after a cantankerous bargaining or a little vegetable that we secure after a good deal of higgling or else a little sweet-meat for babies that is bought at the cost of our next day's grub!

* *
*

30

I WOULD SLEEP NOW!

FORTUNATELY, I sleep soundly. I say fortunately because there are many restless beings who toss themselves this way and that and though they succeed in closing their eye-lids, they don't quite succeed in attaining that stage of physical forgetfulness, we call sleep. My indolent disposition has augmented my sleeping propensities

and though I have not mastered my mind, I have the sleep at my command. At any odd hour can I stretch my longish limbs and plunge in a deep slumber. Nor have the meticulous susceptibilities of that fastidious, over-clean, methodical fellow, who would lie down only in his home, and only in that particular room and only on that particular bed. No! No!! I cannot dream of imposing such embarrassing conditions. I can sleep comfortably on the best of bed-steads and mere floor. The essential condition for sleeping should be that one must have sufficient space just to lie down; that's all. I have habituated my person to accept this modest demand and have solved my sleeping problem. I have observed that bed-rooms and beds have been quite a ceremony with some people. So much attention has been paid to the minutest detail in them, that a person like me would be quite uncomfortable in such a place at least for a substantial time, though I would sleep well enough later. The richer the fellow, the more decorated his lying-room and still more complex his problem of enjoying good, uninterrupted sleep. We often hear of doctors struggling with medicines to hit out an antidote for the relief of some panting millionaire. The reason appears to be that, in all probability, his bed-room is too brilliantly illuminated, there are too many cots for one man to occupy, there are too many soft pillows that get in his way, the material on which he lies is too springy to be

comfortable, there are too many things that are quite unnecessary, and that the fellow has no physical exercise. For you and me, sleep is no problem for the simple reason that you and I sleep of exhaustion, both physical and mental that we are too anxious to save the electricity or kerosene and consequently put out the light at the earliest opportunity, that there is hardly a cot in the house and if there is one there are too many claimants, the pillows are hard and soiled with covers that do wishful thinking along with their owners, that the mattresses resemble the surface of the earth in that they are uniformly ununiform and the cheap cotton having played a veritable riot inside, the owner outside doesn't worry at all about such local fluctuations and sleeps peacefully on it. There are too many things that are quite essential and which there aren't and as for exercise, I need not write. Nature has been kind and considerate to the poor and miserable, at least in one important gift, that of sleep and had it not been for it, this world would have been a burning pandemonium with countless skeletons hovering about, their ghostly moaning piercing at frequent intervals, the air around. When I see a cooly in deep slumber on the hot oven of a cement road or nestling with the blistering girders of a steel bridge on a hot summer noon, I do not now wonder as much as I used to. How many of them do I see stretched on bare foot-paths, when

I return homewards after enjoying a cinema show, and how, regardless of biting cold or torrential rains, they cling fast to Mother Earth and defy the seasonal furies of Nature with a brave heart and terrific endurance? I often remember them when I roll myself to bed, and wondering at their marvellous tenacity, sleep. That suffering humanity has learnt by now that it has to put up a fight alone and does it in its own humble way. As for me, when such annoying remembrances whirl in my head and all my blood seems to rush brainwards I get up from my bed, throw open my window, drink a glass of water and looking at the stars above dream of the day when this Earth would be a pleasant place for all of us, wherein no man shall ever sleep on the foot-path and Nature would wreck her vengeance on the rocks or soil as these elements are nearer to it.

And on such nights, when I go into a meditative trance, I feel a deep inward joy and a soothing relaxation. It is indeed a great pleasure to be awake in the late hours of the night, when all around are snoring and heaving. I imagine children nestling with their mothers and mothers under the influence of their sleep, warding off their sweet attack and sleeping again. I visualize restless husbands by the side of their wives, trying to dramatise what they have seen in pictures. I can almost hear the coughing of the old men, the coughing emphasizing their cracking ribs and those passing pilgrims spitting and

heaving as much as their worn out frames would allow. The old dames would I see, cautious and gentle, fighting tenaciously with life and braving illnesses away, which would sweep away any tough, old man. The king and the beggar, the rich and the poor, the clerk and his boss, the chauffeur and his employer, the landlord and his tenants, in fact everybody is fast asleep or should be so. I alone perhaps am whiling away a sleeping night, gazing madly above and thinking of things and problems which I cannot solve. I would imbibe a few more sips of water and may gaze more madly above but all my sincerity and all my meditation is not going to enrich the world or push underneath the foot-path sleepers cosy beds by magic ! When I consider how we sleep us all, I wonder.

But I do not wonder how I sleep. My bed is an exhibition of careless arrangement, and my rolling helps the maladministration of the realm of my bed. Sleeping at odd hours gives me as much pleasure as does my odd awakening. Sleeping as I consider it, is the cheapest form of escape from this world and the more one sleeps the less disturbed he is likely to be. It is because we respect the sleeping man more than the person himself that the fellow who is asleep is likely to be less disturbed than his wakeful, worrying brothers.

There are reasons why we all do not sleep as soundly as others and others as soundly as us. The king of a small state may have a magnificent set of

bed-rooms in a super-structure of a stupefying palace in the very heart of a slovenly town that would be his capital. He may not sleep as soundly as you or I would, toll starboard and larboard, worrying about his hunting, shooting and fishing or some such manly personal occupations that would be instrumental in bringing prosperity to the State and its people! The financial wizards may be having a really bad time when the moon is perched high up in the sky and might be scheming and plotting to double their resources with a single brilliant stroke of judgment. The middle-class meddler might just be dreaming of being a wealthy idiot and in his mediocre ways might be conjuring up visions of his becoming the Director of a Bank or a big industrial concern, as an eloquent testimony of his enhanced position. It is the lower-middle class and the labourers that sleep well and soundly and though their worries and miseries, is a permanent feature of their lives, they steal a good slumber because physical fatigue triumphs over mental storms.

Sometimes it happens that I cannot sleep for the whole night. Thoughts and ideas, irrelevant in themselves, rush from all quarters and on varied subjects and wheels of musings spin at a terrific pace in my head simultaneously or in conjunction with each other, as they do in an alarm-clock. I toss about my pillow, change my entire position, open the window if it is shut and shut it if it is

open, and do everything possible to snatch a nap but no! That doesn't happen to be my good fortune. I even twist the pillow and raise my head at a higher level with the sole idea of rolling down the stuff and nonsense that revolves in my brain but nothing happens. As a last resort, I put my hand beneath my head and my pillow beneath my head. The torrent of thoughts surges up too forcefully to allow a peaceful night. I do not read, for then I would disturb my family and I do not like to disturb any of them. Dogs bark in the distance, God knows over what and others of his type keep with him a vocal company. From far I hear a distant whistle of a shunting engine or the rolling rattle of a goods train and I wonder what it carries. I live quite near the sea and often do I listen to that deep sonorous laughter of that He man, the sea, and see visions of the crashing waves at high tide, and picture the hissing foam as it spreads. Yes! The foam!! How very like the milk? The milkman arrives, hustles out his small quota for me that he has brought from thirty odd miles, and turns away. I visualize the foam, steal a glance at the milk, rub my eyes to relieve the strain, and yawn in that typical fashion which shows a want of sleep. By this time, everybody else is awake, the news-paper arrives, and I go in the next room and amid the jingle of cups and saucers and the chirping of kiddies, stretch myself saying "I would sleep now"!

31

YES! THAT'S ENOUGH!

Often after a good deal of thrashing, my Fate repents and tries to fondle me for some time after the spoiling fashion of the father who has only one son to worry about. I am so very enamoured by such soft treatment that I feel Nature's exuberance and the limitless expanse of life that could give me a living space and shelter. I know there is a vast field to exploit and gain from and I also know that opportunities are splendid. What I do not know so surely is that whether I am capable of exploiting the vast field and gain therefrom and whether I am that intrepid opportunist the modern world demands. It would be a satisfaction not to arrive at the conclusion and I let myself drift by. That is why I am a commoner and receive a rude treatment at the hands of life. Only when a good sojourn of fortune livens my stay here for a brief bright interval that I gather relief and consolation from it that is long overdue. I feel that you and I are patient waiters and though everything doesn't come to us though we wait, we normally get what we deserve. Individual emancipation from thralldom and want is a purely personal affair and no amount of philosophy or bookish wisdom would rescue any one. I think that the works of eminent

men are their individual outpourings and act only as guides or reference books but I cannot forget the all important fact that should I take a comparative view with any of those celebrated men, I am making the obvious blunder of measuring myself or my peculiar circumstances, with the wrong stick. A famous person is not a normal person and though his life can generally be regarded as ideal for lesser men, his writings may not always be representative. In fact, this is true of everybody to a certain extent. To come again to you and me, I would say that life is a hard nut to crack and when we are trying to crack it, some of us are often losing our teeth! I have written about the economic factor that is the probable key to a man's sub-lunar happiness but that in itself is not the key. Normally a man who earns *can* reach a stage when his earnings can be enough for him. I am excluding that greedy shark who would swim about looking out for some financial prey. I am talking about the common fellow whose monetary expectations are reasonably limited and just a little more income than what he earns would make him almost happy. The tragedy of the reasonable man is that his very modest demands on life are categorically refused while those of the hungry, greedy wolves that gallop hither and thither to pounce on fleshy profits, are gratified. The modest, shy and sensitive chap would get an arrogant, vainglorious and rough fellow as his boss. The

meek and submissive clerk would get a dominating overlord. The normal gentleman would have contact with abnormal fellows. These temperamental battles raise such a hell of emotional wars that we know their consequences well enough. I have written about the misfits in life and misfits in life are violations of natural bends or natural instincts. The temperamental friction is the direct offshoot of these misfits and it is because of this collective discordance that the world as we see it is a smouldering inferno wherein the weaker species perish. It is quite easy to say "Survival of the fittest" and is a sound proposition as far as it is a doctrine in all its nakedness but I cannot persuade myself to be so scientifically cold in shelling out such disheartening maxims that would shatter the hopes of the struggling individual. I honestly believe that the world is seething with teeming millions who are not only not "fit" in the traditional sense in which it is understood but is usually a sub-normal lot that finds its pleasures and treasures of happiness through blissful ignorance. There are millions who are just normal and squeeze out an existence that is a long tragic drama wherein the hero occasionally slashes out a few strokes to attain individuality and doesn't usually shine. For some of his type, life is not a perpetual tragedy, but a dull beaten track which they traverse without either zeal or excitement and wait patiently for the zero hour of Death!

Their achievements are ordinary, their ambitions much more so and so are their expectations. They would talk a lot on their debts, their illnesses and their falls and while doing so presume that the listening victims are patient hearers. Their small minds would conceive petty visions and happily would they dream about it. When quite a large majority of the people fall in this category, and lower than this, I cannot be as exacting in my expectations about the quality of the masses spoiling this globe as does that celebrated exponent of human theories. I have a sound reason for doing so because I consider myself one of them. You would, therefore, excuse me for this partiality, if there is any. The faint glow of the dull life of millions have furnished the limelight for a famous few and though one should not pride oneself on being a contributor to that light, one should remember that his minor part is not iso insignificant as he imagines. After all, the world has to be kept going and all of us cannot secure the jobs we would like to have. It is quite natural that we should struggle to thrust the oars in somebody else's hands and then sit and watch the sublime sea around and marvel at the blazing beauty of sunset on the sea. We may quite enjoy the scene but that sweating man whom we have just handed over our oars is not in a comfortable situation and can neither enjoy the sublime sea nor the blazing beauty of sunset. For him the sublime sea would be too tempestuous

and the setting golden ball of fire, too very glaring for his tired eyes. The raft itself would tremble ominously and though its faltering course may give a pleasing shake to the idle one, the other fellow might just feel like disgorging his sorrowful tales of woe and misery. I feel as if I am the oar-man. I am striving to hand over the heavy oars of drudgery to somebody else and like any other man am just dreaming of cruising on the sublime sea and watch the magnificence of a setting sun. I am sure that then my raft would plough its path with marvellously soft oscillations of comfort and security and the drowning sun would drown my petty and permanent worries of just leading a life without incurring debts, of maintaining a gentleman's home that would welcome warmly anybody at any hour of the day or night, of fulfilling my petty obligations and of generally being a sort of receptacle for things pleasant or otherwise. I cannot even imagine it now but should I happen to be the idler in life and consequently earn better than the industrious, I only hope and wish with all my heart that I wouldn't be converted into such a fool as to look spitefully at that sweating, unfortunate toiler at the oars. Thinking, without the warmth of wealth and with it are, I think, two sets of meditations quite apart and in all probability the former would pour out from the heart and the latter from the head. It is because this world has too many men at the oars and there are only a fortu-

nate few that make a long holiday of their existence here, that we find the universality in our failures and flaws, our follies and faults. Sorrow loses its fire and poverty loses its sting when they are omnipresent factors. These are the very factors we have to exploit and defy their terrific onslaught with a normal equipment of mental equanimity and characteristic fortitude. I think that you and I can achieve that equipoise and that toughness when you and I get down into the ring and settle the accounts there. If I rely too much on external assistance I am destined to be doomed. Like delivery, our struggle is a purely personal affair and the doctor in our parents and the nurses in brothers and sisters can help us only with a sense of their altruistic limitations. It is when we recover and start afresh again after every fall and throw ourselves with a vengeance that is intense, that our lives and all its unpleasant implications are likely to come round and offer us an honourable truce. That is your goal and mine and though I have not as yet sensed any peace-feelers, I feel that a day would dawn when either I would write down the armistice or life, tired of my perseverance, would fly past, uttering faintly through my last breath "Yes ! That's enough !"

I FEEL TIRED

THAT a gathering darkness should suck all mortals homewards and infuse in them a retiring disposition is a comforting fact when I consider that the busy life of the world is at least temporarily suspended and that all of us would now turn to personal and domestic aspects of ourselves. The sombre beauty of a fleeting evening, and the lingering parting of a dying day strike our inner chords and lazily do our eyes wander on a tired world. My moods then get a stable despondency and my brooding propensities spring into action. I look about me and feel that life almost is a matter of returning hurriedly in the evening, to receptive homes, where wives do not grumble and kiddies are not too fond of doctors! The darkness is the veil of the poor man, you and I. It's unfailing sincerity ignores my defeats and I can hide myself in its mystic obliteration as confidently as I would, behind my mother. I return and see block after block lighted and the candle power that illumines them would proclaim the wealth and heart of their owners. When a light beams and goes off too often in a room nearby, I surmise that the man behind that childish play must usually be an extremely miserly and selfish person, He is the accumulating human ant with a foresight that

would more be a vice than a virtue and I wouldn't be surprised to see his children rickety as he would'nt hesitate to economise their feeding expenses! I look further and see the blazing hall of one of my neighbours and hear his radio harshly tuned by everybody in the house. The owner of the radio sings loudly in the bath-room and I can hear that braying. Now he is smoking and his gorgeously clad wife is leaning on the sofa he is occupying and they are having a good time amid. their children. I would be grossly wrong if that couple is isn't a fairly happy one and the man amiable and generous and boisterous and his wife, almost good, unusually broad-minded and generous too. Both of them would allow their kiddies to take liberties with the radio, which they would immensely enjoy and all around would be joy and laughter. I feel gratified when I look at that window and steal a glance in that family's joyous cavalcade. Right above that fountain of joy lives a morose couple with noxious children that shout hoarse silly songs and help in spreading a rascally atmosphere in the house. The lights are dim, the faces of the inmates dimmer and particularly that of the lady is so harassingly perturbed that I can almost see the wound in her heart. I can observe her husband looking here and there with a boyish curiosity and a puerile impetuosity. I turn myself away from that window that emanates an air of gloom and frustration, tragedy and heart-aches. Quite in the-

neighbourhood. I can distinctly hear the shouts and talk of a group of buoyant bachelors and I wonder whether they have gathered for their studies or for creating that hubbub. I look around and see varied scenes but in all of them I see one thing in common. It is that they all are retiring or are about to retire and seek rest. One of them might do so in good moods, the other might just sleep of worrying. The too-quick at the bulbs-man has probably, by now, extinguished all lights, seen thrice in light while extinguishing that all the bolts are safe in their homes, then put them out again, and must have rolled down in an armchair to follow in dark his boisterous neighbours' high-pitched radio that he can clearly listen to and enjoy. I am sure he is enjoying the music thoroughly as he is sure that someone else is going to pay for the electricity that has reproduced the music and that darkness doesn't cost anything. His generous neighbour is still with his family, intermittently listening to his radio with a patronising attitude, while his kiddies and a youngish boy-servant have permeated a sweet air of innocence and mirth that is a delight to watch. But frankly speaking, a happy home is a rare sight. Most of the homes do not chirp merrily but sigh and heave and throw off a repulsive, circumspect air. I know by now that it is night and the world is gradually sinking down to inaction. The treasurer has banged down his copper-cover. The business-man has

slammed his safe, the scientist has closed with disappointment, his research room for the day, the mechanic has stopped cutting and twisting, the clerk has closed his ledger after a hard day's toil and all have found a repose in night. It is because the world is too tired to work that for a few precious hours has it allowed us to stop fooling with tools and pens though there are those horrible institutions, they call mills, whose machines weave and cut as efficiently as they do in the day. I have a deep and instinctive sympathy for the night-shifters. Nothing is more unnatural than to have to labour in the dead of the night when the whole world has closed its eyelids in deep slumber, and then sleep in the broad day light next day when everybody else is up and going. The ethics of the modern world, my dear Sir, are heartless and cannot allow of such sentimental trash as, for example, sleep in the night for the labourers. Whether such a monstrous pre-requisite is a triumph of our industrialization or an ignominious defeat of our human considerations, I cannot for certain say. What I know for certain is that a good many of us worship the machines at night altogether reluctantly and return in the small hours of the dawn with a ghostly alacrity. With advancing industrialization and industrial advancement, I am beginning to get alarmed at the rapid dehumanization of humanitarian considerations. We spend so much for the cattle and then donate for their breeding

a simultaneous call to their husbands to retire and go to bed and to their sticky friends to quit and leave her partner alone. Children have slept by now and their grand-mothers are watching them heave and are now telling their sons the exploits of these innocent bairns. Night-shift mills are beckoning their night victims, gaudy cinema-pesters are luring young and excited fellows within, night hawkers have started out on their daily rounds but the world at large is feeling the strain of the day and is getting tired now and wishes to rest, only to be fatigued the next day. I feel tired too!

* * *

33

WAKE UP! YOU FOOL!

WITH almost maidenly modesty, the sun steals a glance at me through the window and I feel like waking up. I say I feel like, because I do not jump out from my bed as some energetic fellows do. They go to sleep, as it were, not for the fulfilment of a physical necessity, but for the pleasure of getting restless the next morning. In my lying position, I can also be restless and hear the throb around. Milkmen with heavy steps and clinking receptacles comb the streets around me and the better

of their type sing a deep guttural song that has a peculiar charm of its own. News paper-boys shamble along with that peculiar gait and recklessness, with a blank countenance that speaks of no news at all. They have got up too early for their age and are not in my enviable position to enjoy peacefully a cup of tea which has been prepared with the milk, the singing milkman has laboriously brought and to read that newspaper with the tea and imbibe the tea while skimming through the paper. There are others who hurry along with a speed that would give an ache to my ankles should I walk so fast so early but I can observe that this has now been a matter of habit with them. For them, I conjecture, news-papers have no news and ink-pots are almost empty. They cannot stretch idly and indulge in a morning's introspection-introspection at the cost of others. They have been harnessed to machines and the machines to industry, and industry to production and production to want! Paradoxically enough they work and toil and sweat so that they should be in perennial want and need. The mill-hand who weaves out in collaboration with his monster machine hundreds of yards of fine cloth watches the turn-over with tattered clothes, and a look that is since long dispaired of even its partial acquisition for personal utility. His other colleagues in fruit canning factories, are labelling the juicy tins with luscious pictures of fruits and its

complications, and I am sure that none of them have tasted what it is like except perhaps surreptitiously, and you know that these luxury tins would travel to spacious apartments, where the mahogany-wood dining tables would be broad and covered clean, and would have a web of glassy lights above to whet the plump diner's appetite coupled with the artificial breeze of a whirring fan, the too-cold delicacies from the refrigerator in the next room and all consummable paraphernalia that would render the beneficiary indigestion and constipation. For him, the gaudy lables would be more attractive than the contents within. His rickety son and bony wife would hover about worrying because there is nothing substantial to worry about, not even an imaginary appendicitis! The constipated victim would jerk away that tin precipitately creating a panic in that juicy world while the lablers and fillers are labelling and filling more tins so that ill-tempered, constipated plump fellows might jostle them roughly. I visualize this picture while still in my bed and also hear the lablers' kiddies hissing and shouting, playing and tumbling over those empty tins which their fathers have virtually stolen as toys for their offsprings! It is so convenient that children are godly innocent or else their yearnings would have shattered the hearts of many a tough father. The sun is rising higher and has proclaimed that yet another day that would produce a million yards of cloth, a few

my eyelids and feel like stirring myself up, but then I reconsider that any pursuit then either of hobby or of study might make me look a madman in the eyes of all around. The whole universe is calm and I dare not disturb its tranquil silence by my noisy preoccupations. These reflections make me sober and I pull my blanket over my head and keep open my eyes in the dark and close them when I can't help it. The morning finds me a man, reluctant to wake up, unwilling to do anything except to have that cup of tea and sit thereafter with folded hands and a steady gaze. Children then gather around me and I then allow my folly and mocking instincts as much latitude as the kiddies take with me. Sometimes they wonder and look at me with a strange look that says that there is either something wrong or unusual with this hefty, big man who is playing all those monkey tricks with their own excellence. Quite natural for them to think like that when they are wont to see grown ups as serene "philosophers," that plant themselves in broken chairs and read some cumbrous material that makes them lift their eye-brows or wave their hands to signify mental satisfaction or appreciation. The wall-clock is running too relentlessly in the morning and beckoning me to give up aping and fooling and start for the bath-room. I am not a very enthusiastic bather. I take my bath because my wife is too keen about it. I remember the days of my bachelorhood when I was not quite on good

terms with the bath-room. Now I am, or have to be. Suddenly I realize that I have to attend to my work; I have to shave and bathe and fulfil all those matrimonial and official obligations whether I like it or not. The sense of duty drives my mimicry away and as soon as the kiddies see me transformed into a "grown-up" they know that I am about to play the other unnatural role in my double life and bolt away. I watch their fleeing tiny legs, pull out my shirt and look in the mirror just to see whether my collar-bones are emphasising my malnutrition too eloquently. I try to convince myself and look at my lanky reflection and reflect that I wouldn't sleep so heavily that night and do something concrete and all that. I lazily sink down in a chair, without shirt, and the broodings start afresh with a fresh momentum. The merciless clock strikes the zero hour and coldly chimes "Wake up! You fool!"

* *
*

34

ENERGETIC ANTS

THE present world, as I see it, is getting too industrious and the masses too are developing a peculiar tendency to get busy and restless. Often this gradual galvanization into activity

of the populace is a matter of mechanical compulsion but mechanical or otherwise, the globe throbs with its tremor and keeps us going. I consider that we are getting too much like the energetic ants and the shirkers and loafers like me are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain the rigour of modern life and keep pace with its terrific speed. I, therefore, lag behind, along with a few others and watch the busy-bodies move heaven and earth. The busy-bodies sweat of overwork and derive the immense satisfaction of having turned out solid work while we sweat through nervousness, fear and apparent inefficiency. Normally we busy ourselves because of the abdominal obligation and the utter necessity of maintaining a stationary roof. I presume that almost all would like to work just enough to fetch a living and that has been our ancient trait. The few really industrious and hardworking taskmasters and eccentric scientists have brought forth this trouble of civilization which has caught us in its octopian grip. As it is, this place is getting too full of ugly premises of factories and smoking chimneys and red-bricked workshops. The train arrives too punctually and the guard snatches a hasty nap with the flags green and red on his laps. I would rather see him with a kiddy or two on his laps than that squarish starter and stopper but it is too strange a wish. Trains have to be run; guards have to doze in uniform's in secluded compartments.

and flags have to be signalled intermittently. The aged guard may well wish that he should be in his provided quarters, rumbling in old furniture, whistling and guarding the train of his life, signalling his erratic sons; the red flag of paternal advice when they lean astray and waving the green flag of elderly supervision when all is well around, and his young daughters do not flirt. He would wish it really, but there he is planted on a wooden seat in a crackling compartment, with his hat thrown aside, his flags about him, his spectacles on his forehead and a general disorder of the hair caused both by his aged hands and the rushing wind. He is now a busybody, and should consider himself lucky that he gets the rare privilege of stealing a good doze. There are others who are not quite so fortunate. The mechanic is extracting too much from his undeveloped wrist and his bluish veins are shouting hoarse the truth, that they have not that vital red matter within them. His physique has developed oversized muscles and his look has lost all steadiness and is gleaning out a reddish flash that is a testimony of his previous nights' orgy. His limbs are bending and wielding with the cold calculation of mechanical operations and I wonder at his agility and strength. It deeply amazes me to discover that the skilful labourer can sustain and keep up so much vigour with a few morsels of rice and wheat alone with something else to divert the attention from! Really, I pity him.

I may be regarded as a fool to look at him so sympathetically but I cannot help it. His hammering and polishing and cutting and welding may be matters suitable to his machine-mindedness but I cannot even bear the sight of this remorseless struggle between the machine and the man. My abhorrence of these ugly things is an offshoot of my temperamental maladjustment and cannot be regarded either as representative or desirable. In fact, it may appear anachronistic and some of you might just picture me as dreaming in a fool's paradise. So I am, and know it fully well. These writings, therefore, are not a dissentious parade against the steel-world or the modern times. They are but an expression of personal reflections that regret the extra growth of the dividends in shares and the consequent bankruptcy in the higher dividends of nobler traits. This mechanical lash has given us a vision of life, a mere mathematical square and has chopped off the halo of the excellence of pure virtues and senses around it. Gone are the days of simplicity, good-will and that benign spirit of mutual co-ordination. We have become a set of matter-of-fact dry, mathematicians, calculating life, trying to solve the riddle, and passing away with the problem still unsolved. By the time we begin to realise that there is something nobler and higher than mere permutations and combinations of events, it is too late. The machines will pound relentlessly and produce stuff in stunning propor-

tions but we might miss all that is grand and all that is excellent from our lives. The energetic ants are too widely awake and are too restless to be happy and contented. What I feel is, we are producing too much, wearing too little of it and are deliberately creating trouble for us. It is true that our energy and perseverance is often a matter of compulsion and helplessness and that, I feel, is the tragedy of our lives. Helplessness in sticking to our jobs and a forced love for our preoccupation is our painful obligatory duty. We need a precious respite and are in fact, craving for it. The busy world around us is making us dance till we faint away of fatigue and it cannot allow of sentimental considerations. The beauty of life consists in being idle when all our colleagues are sweating full, when workshops are steaming hot and the trains are roaring through. I take an immense delight in closetting myself alone and watch the life so full of activity from my little window. I yawn and try to convince myself that I alone am at ease. The drum of life is drumming a banal song of the fleeing present and I listen with rapt attention to that sombre musical extravaganza. My energy has sunk into some obscure corner of my person and I feel quite dazed at the movement about me. Even the animals are astir, shepherded by man and look with sheepish eyes on that inglorious panorama that crosses their eyes. Smoke and fire are vibrating in-

THE VIOLIN OF LIFE

IT is no small consolation that right in the midst of this money-grabbing vicious group, there breathes a finer species, in ways that are charming in their own ways. This aesthetic group has toned down to a considerable extent the arrogance of modern times and its haughty demeanour. They have managed to secure a peaceful corner where they can gather in the late hours of the night, and strike forth such a melodious note from the violin of life that its temporary reverberations are a direct challenge to the din of the factory and the hissing of the workshop. The world may not find them quite useful in their own line but has tolerated their parasitic existence in a patronising spirit. The society has maintained this category of people for its personal use and it uses them to find an escape from the boresome routine of their daily duties. I think this is very important from my point of view. When I consider that a modern machine-minded society grows occasionally bored of itself and its preoccupations and rushes to seek refuge of and drown their boredom in theatres and concert-halls, I cannot help being convinced that there still are in the cores of our hearts, those rosy artistic rudiments as would glorify life and art in correct proportions, and in spite of the fact that

machines have ploughed our hearts deep to remove that foreign material as it were, so deep has it been ingrained that it would defy the deepest furrows. It is true that we look with a sense of amazement at the young inventor or the magnetic scientist who is an intellectual, grand. But I am afraid our respect springs out of our awe and ignorance. I feel that it is not so with any fine artist. At least I don't feel that way. When I hear a good fiddlist or violinist or a good singer I no doubt get enthralled and merge in his tunes but my respect about him has a comradely tinge in as much as, I think that he has only stolen a grand march over me in acquiring proficiency in that particular instrument and that this is just what I should have done and which unfortunately I haven't. I know then that he has developed a finer ear for music and my respect and love of him are of the kind between a genuine artist and an ardent admirer. We all may not quite understand the full implications of a mechanical invention if they are explained to us. Not so with the finer achievements of man. The crudest of the person would respond to melodious rhapsodies and would oscillate his cruder self in appreciation of that reproduction. The vilest villain can get stupefied at the sight of a wonderful painting, an attempt of the artist to bring on his canvass the poise of life and the vivid colours of the landscape. Every dash of his studied stroke has infused

movement in the picture and as his palette has gone on emptying, his picture has been filling in itself the finishing touches that reflect Nature in all its magical charm. It is not unnatural that the villain therefore, should forget his murderous instincts, his flash of the sharpened dagger, the gory vision thereafter that would gratify his heinous impulses, and the repulsive sight of the noose and hangman, should he come to murder such a painter himself. It is an odd truth that many of us look at the figure of donation inscribed at the foot of the sculptor's whole labour and very few indeed look at the white image and marvel at its stony symmetry. I look at the figure too because I cannot appreciate statutes as much as I can, paintings. The statue has only a single colour and being devoid of the window of the subject's soul, the eyes, lends involuntarily a ghostly atmosphere around the image, howsoever fine the marble, whatever the quality of tiles round about the get up of the iron barricade keeping guard over jumpy kiddies that try to feel its forehead or those party antagonists that tar it in the dead of night.

It has almost been a tradition that the actor shouldn't play the part he plays on the stage, in his life. The comedian then is the hero of his tragic role and the tragedian is usually quite well off in actual life, doesn't starve as he pretends in the shows, but gulps down a good many things, isn't so haggard and bent as people imagine him

to be and once off the stage does walk erect and removes the haggard expression by removing the black lines and is himself again. As a tragic paradox, the comedian and the bussoon may set the houses roaring and hissing and shouting and crying with fun, but behind the very wings of the stage they may see a different scene. Their comic hero is not so comic and their multi-coloured clown is not so monkey-like. Both of them have now undressed themselves and you would probably see extra serene men and if you are observant enough you would usually observe a shade of perpetual anxiety that has darkened their eye-lids and affected their manners. Debts, love-affairs, staring bankruptcy, debauchery, gambling, drunkenness and eccentricity have tormented their persons and once they finish off their roles, only reluctantly done for the sake of money, again would they plunge into a hell of peculiarly artistic but pessimistic speculation. I am referring here to top-class artists and not to cheap extras. I cannot help quoting here the outstanding example of Charlie Chaplin. This little genius that has managed to burrow a niche in the Encyclopaedia, and has swayed the whole world with pure mirth and laughter, had to divorce a few wives. A man who is agreeable to all the world is not quite so to his own wife, imagine that! And yet that is Charlie Chaplin, on screen a funny nomad, in life a serene and serious genius with a versatility that is unique. All these artists and

more in various spheres are, I repeat, playing the violin of life in their own characteristic way for the tired world. I wish to play the fiddle myself, however, poorly, but connoisseurs declare that my hands are too clumsy and so is my person. A little disheartened at that, I lift a puny pen in my clumsy hands and my rough person has made bold to pollute the sacred flower of letters. Giant thinkers with heavy shoulders, have left so much behind that I shudder at the realization of my puerile impertinence. But then something goads me from within, keeps me awake at night and leads me to the paper and pen. I become too restless to keep with myself all that plays a veritable riot in my head and my impulsive nature surrenders to the urge within. I persuade myself that since other artistic doors have been virtually slammed in my face and perhaps that of writing is the only one that has been inadvertently left open, I must make a hurried entrance in its earthly atmosphere, at least by the back-door. Thus have I been a trespasser per chance and am watching the game with as much anxiety and fear as when we slip in a show or a concert or a stadium and enjoy the affair without ticket, our heart beating wildly at anybody's approach. That is my mental state now. Without a proper ticket of study and intelligence have I rushed in a gigantic musical extravaganza, with a single-stringed violin of a tiny pen and though I am feeling a bit awkward as I am quite a novice,

and have a full realization that others of the kind are master-players, am still persévering in my feeble attempt with indomitable optimism. I would play the violin of life as best as I could!

* * *

36

WE DO PERISH

IT is good that we perish. Life, otherwise, would have been a terrible and immortal punishment and we all would have but yearned as much to expire as we yearn to live longer. This sense of limitations has infused life with a tragic grandeur. When I pass a day that is but yet another wasteful day, I know that I am a day nearer Death. Days roll into months and months weave into years and our physiques and minds ripen into a compact reproduction of a human species that knows and understands things. I like to listen to old men because I know that they are more like soldiers returned from the war. They have fought in their youth and their experiences and reminiscences are naturally a treat for me. Books cannot compress within their limited spoils all the forces of life. Individual life is itself a great volume and can furnish a wealth of material. The old man would I listen to, unfold his magic carpet of real tales as would

baffle my imagination. He would gloat over as to how very noxious he was when but a boy, how he was a terror to other boys then, how he flirted as a raw youth, how he married a girl against her parents' will, how many children he got and how many he lost and what he felt on each occasion. Ultimately would he sing the praise of his deceased wife whom probably he treated ill when she was alive and whose angelic devotion has now stirred up repentance in his wrinkling heart. If a bit romantic, he would also tell me his youthful early victories, how a set of fine girls was hovering about his magnetic person and how he jostled them all. Even in the commonplace and normal lives, there are certain happenings and events, that are quite good and exciting in themselves and though they may have but a personal interest, they are interesting all the same. Life is but a reaction of the individual life, patched up together and if the existence of a single soul can have so many sides and delicate corners, what would be the immensity of its collective reproduction ? The old man has an intense desire to survive in spite of the fact that he is not so comfortably set, has a sound reason in that one falls so much in love with life that one would like to watch the fun and tears longer. I have seen old men crying bitterly on death-beds, partly because of their permanent severance from their sons and daughters and life-long partners and partly because life is so dear

to everyone. The ruthless train that mutilates the hot young man committing suicide, must be crushing him down, while actually for a second must he be repeating when actually it is too late to alter the situation. The salty water rushing through all the inlets in a drowning human body must be getting but a momentary halt with the victim realising what a fool has he been? The green poison, rushing towards the heart would stop its sinister course but for a fraction of a second as the failed student takes a last glance at his soiled books and remembers his parents in the village. The noose would get but a nasty jerk, as the suspended struggling fellow, sways himself to and fro with a terrific belated violence to cut or loosen the ghastly chord, as his suffocating person would realise in a moment that this world is less suffocating than the hanging one. But it is too late, it is always too late in such cases. Neighbours always rush just after expiration and talk in excitement and report the matter. Life, however miserable is I say, too precious to be deliberately cast away. There are many lucky fellows who have changed their minds at the last moment and are now not only alive but also are prospering these days. I am sure that they have taken a fright for even natural death better than all of us. Our instinctive fear of Death keeps us on our guards because Death is such an eccentric and unwelcome visitor that one does not know

where his whims would lead him. Hale and hearty fellows proclaiming that they would be centenarians have frozen cold in spacious arm-chairs off a Sunday afternoon after a hearty meal with a book of "How to live longer" or something of the kind in their hands. Frail skeletons, expecting Death to rescue them from a miserable consumptive life have worshipped escape with every beat of their feeble hearts but usually get a delayed response. Bonny girls wither away right in their sweet time and the pink on their cheeks turns at once a ghostly pale. Restless kiddies, a sweet mania for mothers, rest eternally and flutter about no more and with eyelids closed, look like young philosophers and twitch through the corner of their lips a faint smile that derides sarcastically this transient existence in general and theirs in particular. Old women die with wrinkles all over them and bury many a hope and many a trivial lust. Their malice and jealousy, their chatter and their taunts have all died down and what has remained is a receptacle without contents. Old men die with sons awith round bank-books and Insurance policies in securely closed safes while their grand-sons and daughters wonder what the phenomenon is. They have died with a sense of relief that they have maintained the link of the human chain for generations two, have done their part and have now retired. Young wives, delivering their first ones in costly hospitals have delivered

clean but have succumbed to the drain of blood and slept peacefully on white cots in white rooms with white nurses around. They have perpetuated life in their little ones whom they have prematurely forsaken and their aggrieved souls are hovering about their tiny orphans. We all perish, you and I and let me therefore, make the best of what I can till I breathe. A common fellow like me is the most harmless of all the creatures and my mediocrity has helped me here. I am afraid of law and litigation like any other law-abiding citizen and hope to live my time with as much bliss as I can. My humble position has left me but little problems to settle and I hope to settle them some day. A methodical approach to my apparent difficulties would sweep them all gradually off their sticky feet and then would I feel quite at ease. I would then, like my optimistic centenarian, grab a book of "How to live longer" on a hot Sunday afternoon, after a hearty meal and skim through the lines and assert to myself that Death after all, is a certainty but is such a remote affair that I would be a fool to think too much about it and spoil my well-earned Sunday afternoon. Rather would I perish than let that glorious Sunday afternoon die !



CRAWLING WORMS

I think that we commoners are a lot of crawling worms. For us, life is a graded proposition. We can forecast with clerical accuracy, the post we would hold after a decade or the salary we would draw. In no profession has life been so very shorn clean of all its charm as in the clerical life. I know that for most of us it is a matter of getting daily reluctantly from our beds and cleaning our teeth as a sort of obligation. Then follows the tea and the tea reminds us of our shaves. We then gather the shaving material, fix the rusting, cheap blade in a 'Safety' razor and look out for our reflection in a broken mirror. The broken mirror painfully reflects our countenance and we cast a fleeting glance at our sinking cheeks. The soap is miserly and does not give out much lather so we force it to disgorge it and feel its cool, woolish covering... The blade then battles with the tough hair and only our physical force annihilates partially the hairy hordes that throng our chins and its neighbourhoods. This done, we take our baths which is usually only a process of emptying buckets of good water and some have their dinners and others don't. Thereafter we put up a simple dress that we hope would misguide those around us, about both our status and financial position and then fix on a gaudy tie

that gives us a grotesque appearance. Our shoes are burrowed by the curious fingers and have managed to carve out attics to satisfy their curiosity. We wear the stockings of our outer skin, as they last a life-time. Then pitifully looking at the wall-clock and wondering how quickly has time fled, we run for the station, our grub or dinner jostling in our tummies in the process of digestion, and our shouting tie fluttering in the wind. We arrive just in time to catch that rushing train and off are we carried to office, talking all the way of silly things, and on foolish themes. The train spits us out and we hurry to offices, each one thinking that he is so important and so indispensable to his office or firm. Then there we are, glued to our desks while the big wall-clocks toil on the walls. It is the tissin-hour and out we trip for tea and enjoy the odd hour in our own clerical humble ways, wagering in the meanwhile only to take the chance of making some one else spend for us. We return and work again and the evening draws nearer. Our pens slacken their speed and our thoughts bounce homewards. The lengthened shadows of the huge buildings have spread a cool air around and we yearn to return. Then somehow we finish our jobs, slam our drawers and thrust our files in baskets or roll down the ledgers and are ready to start. A moment's delay thereafter is painful. The sun is leaning low and after a day's toil looks tired too, his cheeks flushing with exhaus-

stion. Clouds, pink and golden, sail lazily about and watch the world at play. The ripening mellow of dusk has by now ripened our yearning to go back. Motor cars are hooting hoarsely to corkscrew their way through a muddling traffic. Victoria-drivers are flourishing an extra whip on the almost dead horse and, the sudden acceleration, the vehicle gets thereby, is rendering the bulky fellow within a soft pleasure. But we all walk, carving out our way, elbowing each other and knocking the other fellow about. We look mechanically at the indicator and read a sad tale. No train for a quarter of an hour. The "fast" in between is not sympathetic to our destination and I see my place emphatically negated by yellow letters. A colleague, an acquaintance or an office-chum then meets us and out start the talks in full bloom, on important subjects such as promotions, supersessions, funds, balances, debits and credits and all those nauseating and clerically technical terms that absolutely hold no meaning for the rest of the world at all. Occasionally some of us, instead of joining in that spicy talk waste their precious time and are silly enough to peep into the evening paper of some strange follow and just attempt to catch a glimpse as to what is astir around. With a groaning hiss, the train pulls up and a gentle breeze that rushes through the windows refreshes us all. With every halt we realize that we are getting nearer and as we get down to our

respective destinations, again we repeat the process of jostling and elbowing with almost a vengeance. Once out, we feel at home and strut on and on. We know that a walk of a few minutes would lead us to that place we call our homes and we also know that a soft creature is expecting our arrival and waiting for us, with perhaps a little darling in her hand. By this time our clerical mind is astride of official barricades and we are nearing the soft mental stage of clerical inertia. The gathering gloom of the approaching night compels us to gather ourselves up and we hurry with a sunken face and a clerical hunch. Life as it is, has bent our youthful spines and has spoiled our gait to a shamble. The collar-bones are protruding too curiously and the ribs resemble a cage. The eyes have become but the private instruments of offices and we blink embarrassingly should we utilise them for any other reason. Thus we— the lords of many an impoverished damsel return home in the gloom of the dusk, in the artificial welcome of electric lights. We have invested our thinking capacity, our intellect in the fixed deposit of this commercial exploitation and we are expecting dividends by way of partial promotions and preferential treatments. Our little minds conjure up petty visions and in that tiny world of our own imagination do we see ourselves “well-set” — that is, we only then hope to have an income that would rid us for good and all, the money-lender, the loan advancing

foul institutions and the help of our fathers-in-law! We hope to have a son, get a daughter and then glorify womanhood. Our clerical accuracy in calculation has encroached too deeply within our finer selves and we have learnt involuntarily to look on our sons as living guilt-edged securities. We have lost all values of life and in fact, now do not care for them. Our office is our consolation, our sanctuary, our religion. Daily we worship the paper-gods and wait patiently year after year in a state of piteous expectation. The world around drinks pink and scarlet beverages and dances and sings in spacious halls strewn with brilliant lights, while robust girls and late-bloomed ladies permeate an exotic air of sensuous exuberance and epicurean recklessness. We do not need all that. We drink an over-boiled cup of tea, sing while we bathe in darkish bathrooms, and as for sexual exuberance coupled with epicurean recklessness, we are a lot accustomed to a strictly one-way traffic mentality. Our sincerity in our work has rewarded us the premature awards of whitish hair, delicate wrinkles, raped spines, hollow cheeks, impotent eyes and a perpetual look of desolation and despair that is simply maddening. But we have learnt to love our work. We have learnt to ignore pleasures with ascetic cynicism. We have learnt to detest wealth because we can't hope to possess it any time in our lives. I repeat therefore, that we are a monstrous bunch of crawl-

ing worms rotting in the eternal quagmire of clerical subjugation and its consequential offshoots of want, despair, poverty and children. Only our marvellous adaptability and wonderful endurance have kept us going. To that extent we can truly compliment ourselves that we are a philosophical species of stoical humanity that has been fighting out a life and death struggle and extracting as it were, right in the midst of that debacle, a few moments of relief, rest and retirement. Now it all has been a matter of habit with us and daily are we crawling in our ridiculously tiny orbits of duties and our work and are rusting ourselves through to the extent of getting altogether useless. The mental deterioration of our half-cultivated minds is the magnificent victory of this machine age, this civilization and this modern life. Poor crawling worms !

* *
*

38

HAPPINESS THROUGH NON-ENTITY !

THE crawling worms and their like have certain advantages over luminaries and can, on certain occasions and in certain periods be happier than them. The price of celebrity is fabulous and I

doubt whether we would be prepared to stake so high. I have, like many others, the pining of loafing through the milky way, but I have neither the perseverance nor the quality that gives a distinction. Well ! Most of us are like that. We have thought it now a common occurrence that somebody else should be raised on the dais of fame and we, along with a few of our kind should sit lower, and clap and extol him. The fellow then smiles in token of acceptance of these vocal felicitations and then are we gratified. Some good speaker happens to arrive in your city-God knows from where and there you are with a few enthusiastic friends to make up the crowd! That and that alone is your role, and no more. Some cine-star passes your way and you halt and look with eyes aghast at that "divine" specimen of humanity then in mere flesh and blood and just wonder that he is physically as you are or as you were ! We all imagine that the conspicuously famous are a happy lot, but let me tell you that they have their own worries. They are happier in many respects because they have an artistic excellence which we cannot usually attain. I for myself, knowing well my incapacities and the inferiority of my nature am trying to squeeze out happiness through non-entity. My low position and lower earnings have so severely censored my kaleidoscopic vision of life that what has now been left is but a silhouette of life reflected against

the snow white back-ground of ignorance. This has made matters simpler and problems less intricate. Having been convinced for certain that life holds no glamorous positions for me, and that it is going to be a matter of mechanical activities, I have resolved myself to develop an attitude that would defy cynically the rough treatment at the hands of Fate and keep me smiling and always contented. One has often to be an impractical simpleton to be able to be above the ruffle of petty human convulsions of emotions. I have found that this implies a reckless disregard for material prosperity. I cannot altogether be an impractical simpleton or be regardless of my material prosperity. That is too much to expect from a little chap like me. My point is, I am aiming in that direction and do not quite know to what extent I have been successful. I have for long known a few things too well and one of them is that I have to formulate a personal policy, a personal attitude and a personal view about life and having once determined their basic structure I have to mould myself to fit in them as cosily as I possibly can. I know that all copy-book philosophy and bookish wisdom will not solve my personal problems and that I alone have to clear them clean. Books and maxims are but basic fundamentals in which life almost is compressed but my own little difficulties and obstacles may be so ridiculously trivial that no book or no maxim

would, by now, have probably stooped so low as to allow a touch at them; even lightly. I am aware that good reading develops a better person and that books are the priceless treasures of humanity. But what I feel is, printed wisdom has a definite limit beyond which it certainly cannot go and there is where a common man like me usually stumbles and falters. Individual initiative and personal courage are demanded on those occasions and no amount of thriller reading would render even a fraction of the dash or courage which the imaginary hero displays.

It is here that a common man like me faces his real test and should he fail, his non-entity saves his face as he is but little known. Failures are a common occurrence with us but a success is something rare. I personally have achieved no great success anywhere and a habitual rebuff has taught me to take failure for granted in every venture of mine. If I am unsuccessful, it is but as usual. To add to my consolation, I get the benefit of having been a fellow of some perseverance. Then I look again at the whole tumbling structure of my hopes and say to myself that I had done my level best, and had done everything possible but as it happens, it was not to happen. My non-entity offers me enough leisure to indulge in such sombre reflections. I have made it a point to justify every failure of mine and get rid of any responsibility about its ultimate frustration.

An eventless life is a life without vicissitudes and I don't regret that I haven't those fluxy undulations of circumstances that have a charm of their own. The straight line of my career cannot be pulled up in a rising angle of financial prosperity and I cannot therefore draw a graph of my life and view it with a comparative eye. I don't bother about such comparisons and secret introspection. I am teaching myself to appreciate the straightness of the straight line and by now have almost fallen in love with it, though be it be understood that my love is not a spontaneous overflow of natural feelings but an affection born out of a more or less permanent association. I am consoling myself that the line may be too straight to be charming in any stage but it has one great good point. It is that it hasn't those jerky ups and downs that would be too much for a normal man like me to bear or sustain. A meteoric rise would stun me to stupefaction and a catastrophic fall would drive my sentimental self to the point of committing suicide. The straight line of a straightforward life is not therefore altogether bad and has its own charms and attractions. I have evolved this personal theory for personal convenience and that is how I am weathering disappointments, and sharpening my little pleasures. I feel that such convenient twistings are quite essential if one has to make out the best of one's stay here. If I go on comparing myself to those above me and those

below, I would be in a horrible state of mental restlessness and consuming greed. I do not want it. My life as it is, though wasting itself in a sort of rut, has developed a few personal angles that slant in different directions and give me a satisfaction that is quite unique. They have almost compensated me to the extent of making myself generally happy. I know that some cynic may call this a sweet personal deception but I for myself am not cynical enough to accept such a view of the whole matter. This conviction has kept me buoyant in spirits and healthy in my outlook. The drab colours of my life then do not appear to be so drab and I sometimes pull my full weight to gather the rainbow colours of celebrity and art in it. This emphasizes my non-entity all the more, adds to my chain of failures, gives me the credit of perseverance and straightens further the straight line of a dull existence. But I am happy all the same.

* *
*

39

MY LEISURE

I am an idealist by nature but have now become a practical idealist more or less. I have learnt that mere idealism and wishful dreaming cannot award even a bare maintenance and our idealistic

tendencies and dreamy instincts have to be sterilized and then utilised as the essential fundamentals of aesthetic persons we then hope to be. But there are times when I, sometimes alone, and often in the company of my shrewd friends bring forth together all our sterilized aestheticism and get intoxicated by its lulling influence. That is my world, the world that I conceive and the world I hope to live in. My friends and myself are clustered together in darkness and have stretched ourselves on the soft sands. The sea is singing a serious song and the moon looks dejected. The stars are twinkling with maidenly apprehension and all around is quiet and serene. A gentle breeze is emphasizing the red glow of our cigars and we have now an immense craving for tea. We warm our lungs by inhaling cheap cigarettes and cough as a consequence. The topic has drifted from subject to subject and we are laughing lowly for fear of disturbing the tranquil beauty of the night. Our talk is flowing smoothly and we all are loquacious enough to keep it going but are patient enough to hear the other fellow through. All others have left the beach long ago and a few whimsical fellows like us are still rolling on the sands. Our talk has gone far into the night and we all are feeling so happy. Away in the distance some windows blink out a yellowish light and are looking so beautiful. I wonder who stays there and why has he put such a powerful lamp there. As I look into the darkness covering the

sea, I can see a few silhouettes of the sailing country-craft and can clearly mark out the sixty-degree angle of their sails. Then somebody says "It is too late" and though it is really too late, we lazily stroll on homewards.

After all, we all work hard so that we might enjoy a few spare hours in our own way and as we like. The trouble with the modern life is that it gives us a leisure as reluctantly as we give the alms. This charity that life showers with a philanthropic air is so fleeting and slippery that we have to be quite agile in trapping it and exploiting it to the full. I do not look upon my leisure as the land of lost contents but rather as the very fountain of repose and retirement and the resultant contentedness. I have a habit of gathering people around me and then we have a good time. They may be any people, my family members, my friends, my neighbours-anybody in fact. It is a great joy to talk with and listen to others and no organ of my person is, I presume, as active as my tongue. Sometimes I lose my "mood" and at once I become reticent and serious. The chair that holds me finds me quite stable for a pretty long time and away I look at nothing and think out a muddle of ideas and plans. Many things then pass over my mind in rapid succession and a cyclone of tumultuous, irrelevant brooding shakes my internal fabric. Nothing comes out of this waste of time and thereafter I regret that I have but wasted my

leisure But it is not altogether a waste either. This leisurely introspection sometimes hits upon ideas and thoughts and this work, in fact, is the outcome of such ramblings.

I am not very fond of walking. It makes one unnaturally hungry. It makes me too tired as well. I cannot see the point in walking a long, long distance and tire my feet and person out merely for the pleasure of walking. Walking is too common a phenomenon to be something unique and the pleasure of extra walking may have a gymnastic charm, but, as it happens, I fail to appreciate the fun of the two-legged race. We city men walk so little that our feet are but essential physical bases without which we would have to totter or to crawl and their real use for us happens to be that they have to be pairs that are suspended from chairs and give us only an anatomical symmetry ! I release my feet from the prison of a compact chair and give them complete independence and latitude. They stretch themselves in all angles imaginable and sometime raise themselves higher than the level of my high-banded head. That position is very comforting. It seems to me that blood runs downwards, the feet become lighter and the fatigue vanishes. My idea of using my leisure best is centralised in keeping my knees stationary and the waist, stable. In fairness I then set my tongue rolling. I say in fairness because most of us, when we work, do

actually work and do not chatter about things we do not understand. The flourishing lawyer would do otherwise. He would return with a triumphant face, convert himself into a human being by removing that sinister jet coat, and afterwards would go out for a good walk because he was too much in the chair and felt tired of sitting. His walk would give some rest to the talking machine set in his cheeks. Common fellows like you and me are muzzled too much to have anything to talk about, and we talk a lot when we are free to do so.

The leisure of each season has a pecular flavour and obligation. The summer-leisure makes me restless and I feel like stirring out but the days are too hot. I see visions of ice-cream and cold-drinks and the ruthless massacre of ice by reckless waiters. Fancy glasses flatter themselves with novel contents of tempting colours and the ice floats lazily in them with the buoyancy of a parasitic son of some wealthy landlord. People sweat, boys fail, girls are promoted, matches are ingloriously lost, circus owners suck us to their tents, and new films appear. Our leisure then chooses one or several of these options and the leisure seems only to be a matter of keeping oneself cool in hot weather. The cold season is not quite so cold, and winter leisure is not quite as gloomy. For me it is a matter of sweaters and mufflers and warm blankets and receptive shawls. One sleeps well any time and this I believe, is the best use of leisure. I am mention-

ing the monsoon-leisure last because I like it best. It's a wet and clammy world we then live in. Rain-drops patter and worms squeak ominously. The sun takes refuge behind the dark clouds and the stars leap into their holes afraid of the thunder and lightning. My leisure then acquires a beautiful balance over my emotional somersaults. I catch a gloomy nook of one of my rooms and quietly do I sit there for long. I can see from there that the whole world is hushed into a damp silence and I perpetuate the silence and derive the pleasure of having become one with the universe. Darkness then gathers around my secluded self but neither do I feel like getting up nor do I wish to put on a light. The obscure beauty of my room do I enjoy then like a bat off a wet evening. Away in the distance I can see some umbrellas struggling homewards and the chirping of the kiddies below, floating a colossal navy. What an innocent godly joy? They are risking their capital ships and I can hear them giving a deafening good-bye. As night crawls around I feel depressed and lazily do I switch on my light. I plunge at once into an artificial world of brilliance that is too dazzling. I move to my window. There are fewer umbrellas now. The capital ships and the colossal navy having been wiped out by a beastly shower, their commander-in-chief has bolted away. In the sombre yellow gas-light, I can see the ship-wreck from above and wonder what the salvage corps is

now thinking about it. It grows a bit colder now. I go in and wrap a blanket around me and pace my room. I am expecting a friend or two. If they come, I will have a good hot cup of tea with them. But I doubt very much whether they would stir out. They must be pacing their rooms too, must be expecting me and waiting so that we should have the tea together. Nobody has turned up. I am having my tea alone and have just opened a good book. I am having a good time, isn't it?

* * *

40

MY ILLUSIONS

MY dreamy person entertains a few illusions about life that has the mental back-ground of a stumbling idealist and a piping iconoclast. It is a sporadic upheaval of wishful thinking that dreams of sufficiency, its consequent contentedness and the resultant happiness. I visualize a world that would not only be a colossal expanse of soil and stones, mountains and vallies, seas and rivers but also one that would be a commodious expanse of an economic stretch as would make the problem of survival less stiff. If some economist rapidly splinters out astronomical figures of production, population and distribution, he is talking in a

language that really very few can understand or assimilate. Should he emphasize that the Mother Earth is too fertile to let anyone starve or half-starve, his emphasis has but an academic value. The soil may be turning over tons of food and over-producing areas may be drowning the excess in the seas, but the cruel fact remains that there are those who would dive in the sea to rescue that sinking yield of Nature's philanthropy! What's the worth of this civilization of ours if people roam half-naked about and eat what would appear to be disgraceful food to a decent fellow? What on earth is the earthly use of those devillish machines if their sole purpose is to suck our blood, snatch our extra loaf of bread and leave us at the mercy of a merciless leech of a money-lender? What's the use of building superstructures, if most of the tottering humanity is huddled up together in a few square feet of a darkish room? What's the use of those national museums seething with rare and precious curios if half the children of the world are raising a hell for a single cheap toy, and then are sleeping down of childish anguish, volatile disappointment and a momentary wrath, with the thumbs in their tiny mouths—the only toy they ultimately play with! What's the use of fashion parades when millions of women aren't getting enough clothes just to cover their shame? The big clubs for big bosses and millionaires are fit places to show themselves off, and their wives,

gorgeously dressed, strutting about with a pathetic effort to look charming and talking all the while in abnormally foolish ways. Yes! What use are they to the shivering, unfortunate lot that consists of you and me? I am not used to night-life nor do I presume are you. Most of us aren't and consequently are not interested in its complications and programmes. Yet do I see reports, when in some aristocratic hotel, a few big heads gathered and talked about "Evils of Poverty" under the canopy of diffused chandaliers, sitting on broad receptive chairs in front of heavy squarish tables, their bald heads gleaming forth their affluence more than their dress! "Evils of Poverty" are enumerated, talked through and then a tired group of wealthy intellectuals, emerges, occupy their super-luxurious cars and travel fast to those rich abodes wherein servants and dogs are still awake, waiting equally sincerely the late arrival of their masters with an expectant face. What use, I repeat, are all those discussions and talks when poverty has been a chronic cancer of an advancing civilization? In our enthusiasm to be rationals we have not only not failed to be so but our progressive world has gradually evolved an untenable, selfish, haughty and egoistic species of human beings that I think is no great credit to a presumptuously sensible world. We get a crop of expert consultants but I cannot respect the medicos that are both too expensive and generally inconsiderate.

What use are they to poor parents ? An unfortunate child might be heaving out his last pantings, and a good consultant might perhaps yet let him heave years hence if he could be brought or bought, but no ! The young father bending over a frantic mother holding the child, is prepared let him pass into a world where life is not subjected to economic partialities and consultants are brought by a mere message and not bought by currency notes. What use are those doctors and their specialised training if their advanced knowledge can be of no use to the common man ? Of what use are the bumper crops if the farmer has only to be the beast of burden and a tool of a blood-sucking money-lender ? Well ! Sir ! As I see it, my illusions are conjuring up too many wishful visions in a realistic world. I am still hopeful that some-day we would improve our lot and those of others because I derive that hope from the fact that most of our worries and miseries are man-made and consequently deliberate as it were ! If a perverted economic back-ground can be made less perverse and if everybody is given the same latitude and liberties, most of our worries would vanish. The good earth *can* produce enough for all and well-fed people are more likely to generate happiness than the half-fed millions. The rigour of the machine-age can be softened and in fact, this civilization can be made palatable if its wielders would be good enough to introduce in it the human factor.

Machines in themselves cannot be either good or bad. They are the tokens of our intellectual superiority. The trouble is that we have spoilt them by sparing altogether the canes of curb and restraint, sensibilities, and reasonableness. My illusions therefore, conceive a hearty lot of workers that would master their machines and not otherwise. I know that it would be a magnificent folly to suggest to decivilize civilization and melt those marvellous sets of machines and intricate plants as a preliminary to a simple life. That would be Quixotic. None can afford to smash the glorious heritage of scientific knowledge that we have inherited after such a terrific struggle. What I would only wish is that the world shouldn't go so fast. Its speed is neck-breaking. A common man like me finds it immensely difficult to keep pace with it. And there are far more common men than uncommon, more inefficient than efficient, more loafers than real busy bodies. If by some chance the progress can be made to slow down so that a normal fellow would find reasonable time to get himself acclamatized to new conditions, the progress itself would gather momentum as the commoner would turn out to be a better man of grasp than would he be if he were left out. My illusory world then is distinctly partial towards the man in the street and I would wish him to have a clean house, with a garden around, work just enough to let him enjoy a few spare hours and

clothing that would flatter his person. All this is not impossible. The world is admitting the common to unadmitted positions and his growing insertion in vital positions may affect vitally your lot and mine. It would require perhaps a few more wars to make us perfectly sensible and then would we all gather under the glorious flag of liberty, equality and fraternity, all nationalities, all castes and all creeds and then sing the universal anthem of mutual good will, security and prosperity.



4]

OUR FILMS

AS a matter of fact, an off and on cine-goer should not pretend to have the scruples of a cine-critic. He should make the most of his privilege to enjoy for a couple of hours on his hard seat, laugh when the crowd laughs, roar when it roars and wipe off with the semblance of a dirty rag, the unexisting tears, when "pathos" is projected. In spite of this, I am convinced that there may be a few exceptions who are capable of seeing through the silver screen and joke at its absurdities and applaud whatever little they see with applauding.

I once again mention that I am but an occasional visitor and as such constitute the mass that

pays most, that enjoys best and criticises least. Like life, the front-benchers take films as they come, hum the songs till the gloss of novelty is unworn and do not normally worry about the merits and demerits of individual productions. I will attempt to depict below some few defects which, I think can altogether be eradicated.

It has always struck me that our pictures are dull, very dull. They lack action, they lack movement, they lack tempo. To show an amorous glance, our directors would waste at least hundred feet of precious celluloid; to project our heroine, opening her lover's letter, another hundred feet would be ravaged. These two illustrations are given, as I think that they are fairly representative and I hope, many would agree to what I say. I scarcely remember a film wherein women have not been shown casting languorous glances and heroines opening love-letters with so much rattle that one might mistake it for their heart-throbbings! It really requires a skilled director and an astute editor to produce a final effort that is adorned by amusing and touching incidents and is shorn of sheer nonsense. It often so happens that a good effect and impression produced on the audience by a succession of good scenes and incidents is at once blasted out by an untimely song—a song so cumbrous in its vent and so scientific in its exposition that the audience that is brought on the top-pitch of expectation and excitement after herculean efforts, simply falls flat.

I have seen several foreign films that have practically little or no story but what a difference in their presentation and ours? True, we may have less machinery and bad equipment but I am not prepared to tolerate the argument that we lack the necessary mental equipment and artistic genius capable of stunning the world-market. If the argument is advanced that the industry is in the hands of uneducated, rich, foolish and undeserving persons, then certainly it is our fault.

The length of the film is another disturbing factor. I have definitely shuddered within my uncomfortable seat on seeing, the length, before the war time restrictions, upto 13,000, 14,000 even 15,000! What a torture for a precious pair of eyes for nearly two and a half hours, should the film happen to be 'so-so'? And the film, unfortunately does turn out usually to be 'so-so'. Couldn't we compress all our supidity in a spoil of 10,000 feet or so and relieve our power of vision for lesser deterioration somewhere else? Must we have nearly a dozen "melodious" songs by 'Nightingales' in snug nests, 'Nightingales' whose sole mission in life seems to be singing, dancing, drinking, dressing and - shall I say undressing? Must we have a hero with a high "intelligent" forehead, a straight Roman nose and a pointed chin who, would be of course poor, who would of course love to rich girl, whose father of course would oppose tooth and nail, their projected

matrimony, and who would, to exemplify his nobler instincts would hand her over to some stupid barrister or doctor, his fiancee acquiescing in her father's proposal through sheer paternal devotion and love!

Well! This is usually the stuff a production is made of. Advertisements, whimsical advertisements flash their false messages in thousands of homes through news-papers and several other ingenious devices of duping the public in the end. News-papers normally will of course shout hoarse the praise of even useless pictures and why should the editor worry as long as his tottering concern gets the solid concrete support of advertisement charges? I have rarely seen a fearless and frank criticism in any journal on films.

Many producers set upon their task with higher motives. Their aim is to educate, to instruct, to guide the masses. But something goes wrong somewhere—I shall not mention where and this band of altruistic enthusiasts produce the stuff that is the popular brand, that is the brand that shows that there is only one sentiment in the human breast and that is love! Love alone! Love and nothing else! It is not the love between the brother and brother or sister and sister or father and son or mother and son; nor even that of an aging father and an aging mother. No! The love—the carnal love of a young scoundrel and a flirtish, foolish, flimsy, flirt. That rich thing drops down on the



I like fat people! (P. 6)

road, presumably in a motor accident and this young hero, unlike you or me or anybody else, always happens to be there, where young girls come in trouble and rescues her and she giggles and he loves and she loves and they kiss and embrace each other all in five minutes. I am aware that the filmland is not expected to depict the true representation of life in all its glory and fall, but even the bouncing fury of mechanised celluloid has to be brought under restraint and surveillance to the extent of showing the public that the exhibit may not be truly illustrative of what we live in, but has, to a reasonable extent, a semblance of truth and reality. Even this reasonable expectation is not fulfilled and what we see is not the life itself, nor the dreamland of the shadowy world, nor a compromise of both, but a half-hearted reproduction, half-hearted eccentric reproduction, miserably processed phonetically chaotic, intellectually muddled patch of a rot that laughs and shrieks and screams and expects the masses to respond !

Yes ! The masses respond because the majority cannot help it, because the poor people are too ignorant and sentimental, because their emotions are not as yet boiled down by a modern education and because they are partly incapable of thinking things out—much less to form an opinion. The average cine-goer is normally such a miserable fellow that he bumps in the theatre much in the same spirit in which an average drunkard enters

the tavern; that is with the sole idea of drowning his worries, his cares and his miseries. Whatever is presented, he gratefully accepts, and returns homewards with a sinking heart and a melancholy spirit. His own abode provides a sinister contrast to that he had just seen in the theatre and he rolls starboard and larboard on his bug-infested bed with absolute despondency. Here is another failure for the film-producers. Why not produce films that show the plight of our citizens as it is? Certainly the dramatic pattern of the production can be maintained without serious detachment from the basic truth and intrinsic fact. But no! That is not our good fortune. It seems that that will not be our good fortune for a good many years to come. Take this simple thing for example. Our producers are seeing foreign films now for years and I should say, seeing standard films. They have not caught the simple point that the comedian never laughs, the audience laughs. Our comedians burst into such a hysterical laugh that the audience is forced into it, many times against its will and when a few people start laughing the mass psychology affects the rest. Producers believe, of course wrongly, that they have set the whole house roaring. Honestly I tell you that I have many times wondered why others laughed, and laughed so loudly that they seemed to enjoy it. Whether such incidents are the triumphs of the blissful ignorance of the Indian audience or of their low taste or are the personal triumphs of

long-haired heroes, is hard to ascertain. But the fact remains that such incidents do recur.

Another item that has always occurred to me as being more or less a flaw in our productions is the absence of subtlety. In the childhood of this industry in our country, and especially from the period when the dumb pictures were given the benefit of a waxing eloquent tongue, this commodity was, if I mistake not, imported from the sentimental and sensitive region of Bengal along with its accompanying ideology. Erring directors and producers saw something novel in this and caught it and reflected it often with embarrassing results. Even to this day, I think, our chief flaw of handling the quality of subtlety seems to be that when a subtle scene is depicted, the producer wastes such a volume of celluloid as a necessary prelude to it that the soft subtle scene actually becomes an absurdity of the first magnitude. Often the 'suggestive scenes' are also not less ridiculous. Usually they are too obvious and as such, lose the quality of subtlety.

Lack of novelty is another boil, harassing the diabetic patient of our cine-industry. It is indeed true that our Indian life has fewer vicissitudes of life than his western colleague but to console oneself on this account alone would certainly do discredit to our creative genius. Novelty could very easily be introduced if only our hard-boiled directors and producers are prepared to cast away orthodox ideas once for all, about themes, personnel

and settings. Let him be a hero of the story who looks ordinary, the man of the crowd, the ordinary man in the street. Let the heroine be a girl, a normal girl with a normally tolerable appearance, without a dazzling made-up face and without those exquisite saris. Let their eyes open and shut naturally. If the hero has, and he usually has, the capacity for chest expansion, let him not heave at awkward moments and let him not do it more than what is strictly necessary. Indulgence in this 'Pranayam' (breathing exercise) is always embarrassing when once the sense of propriety is lost. The father of the heroine need not always be an affluent fellow. He need not always suffer from some chronic disease and consequently be made the butt of laughter and derision. The mother of the heroine need not always be dead, alive only in an enlarged photograph in a spacious drawing-room, looking out on the scenes of romance which her vivacious young daughter would indulge in. Let the hero do some honest work and show him as a tired man of the world returning home after a hard-day's work and thus earning his livelihood by the sweat of his brow. Let not the household servants be too faithful, shedding tears in quantities for apparently no reason. Above all, those heroes, often stupid and too well-dressed, the sooner they disappear from limelight the better. This is India. Girls are not so bold and outrageously immodest both in their attire and

speech as flashed out. Neither do they take out boys for outings as shown. If the heroes insist that they must drive motor-cars with bewitching 'angels' and must always love them, fondle them, and spoil them, give them no scope. Let not the producers take advantage of the fact that the masses like to see sensually bright and vivid pictures and let them not spoil the public taste. The real producer is he who would mould the common taste. Let not the thrillers lose all sense of proportion. Let the heroes understand that their opponents are not always made of clay so that four or five of them simply topple over with a single knock-out blow. Let the story writer have his say. This poor intellectual is often made the scapegoat, because of the irresponsible behaviour of the directors and producers who often consider themselves omniscient. Let the photographers thoroughly grasp the fact that the camera is the very soul of the picture and that they are *his* efforts that are actually seen. As such, let the cameraman be a person, a studious, hardworking and a giant worker. Let the Recording system do the most it can; let it reproduce as naturally human and earthly voices as possible. Remote resemblance of human utterings is but a poor consolation. I have seen pictures talk even when the mouth of the speaker is shut! Nothing is more disgraceful than bad synchronising. Let the settings be in tune with the object in view. It is a sheer waste of money.

to have a magnificent temple for a couple of minute's show. If the company has enough money to squander, there is scope enough in other directions. Personal attention should be given to the minutest detail and no detail should be considered as of comparative little importance. It is the collective representation of a group of given objects that gives a harmonious effect and raises in esteem, the skill of the director who uses his discretion.

Many actors and actresses present a very miserable appearance in spite of an otherwise good face. This is understandable. This lot is usually drawn from the lowest crust of the society and he who cannot do anything, becomes an actor - that is an extra ! They speak and when they blurt out you can see that they are doing so like parrots and should you look in their eyes and in their haggard faces, you would almost certainly read a tale of wasted nights and slept-through days. "Educated fellows are not forth-coming", that is the excuse. The complaint fortunately is fast vanishing. Let the length of the film be moderate, not too long, nor too short like some foreign films. Introduce the cartoons. The initial efforts may not be encouraging but teach the public to appreciate the burlesque and cartoons would be in demand. Indian News-items should precede the main film. India, this wonderland can afford precious opportunities to an astute artist. Let the 'big guns' raise the salaries -

of all the low-paid and curtail the fabulous salaries of certain individuals. The low-paid would then work heart and soul and the over-paid would exactly know where he or she stands. The false idea of raising the prestige of the producing company by fattening the salaries of one or two individuals should immediately be done away with. Let all work harmoniously and in the team-spirit. Give promotions to workers by merit and not through influence. Advertise moderately and discreetly. Never raise too many expectations in the public mind by advertising stunts. The duped public never forgets the name of the producing concern and the second attempt of such a concern, though apparently an improved edition, may fail through tradition. Let better people come in the industry, literary persons who know and understand. Better recruitment of all the personnel that matters would certainly produce a fine picture. I am sure, however, that if these suggestions are translated into action, the product would be something worth being proud about. I hope to see better films in the days to come as surely as the days that would dawn.

THE TEETOTALLER

HUMAN beings are physically all alike but in their mental make up are so distinctly different from one another that every individual has a distinctly different individuality that marks him out and distinguishes him from the rest. These varied individualities comprise the patch-work of characters and its kaleidoscopic shades baffle my imagination. One of those shades is clearly snow-white and that shade belongs to the teetotallers. I entertain an instinctive fright for this category. It is a moral fright. Who can be comfortable in the company of those disciplinarians? Not I! I would feel that they would scrupulously watch all my moves and keep a moral guard over me that would simply be harrowing. I like their discipline but cannot appreciate their enthusiasm to cleanse the world. The world is too sceptic for such stalwart stoics and they would do well to let it waste itself rather than attempt to improve a degenerating lot of humanity. That would be a suicidal bid and this grand specimen of our ideals would unnecessarily waste itself in that process.

I had once the misfortune to meet a teetotaller. I knew he was a man rather strict at eating and drinking but I had no idea that he belonged to that chronic, incurable type! I thought that he

was elastic enough to let himself go a bit to the extent of having a cup of tea but I was mistaken. He was thoroughly spoilt and politely refused it, lecturing on the poisonous traits that develop in it after a given time. It was shocking to hear it all. For the life of me, I could not imagine that a single cup of tea, radiating a yellowish invitation, could be so sinister as that and I drank it clean well enough. I cannot help feeling that he is missing too much fun from life. I would admire the spartan propensities of an aristocrat stoic but I would never desire that I should be so. The teetotalism is too stiff to allow of any looseness or latitude and any elasticity for enjoyment, pure and simple. A man with a clean slate of his life or career cannot be a dazzling specimen and though he may be a success as a man of the world, yet I think that he is too dry to appreciate any thing, even his own success! I am not sure whether people of this kind are stoic in their talks as well, but if they aren't, they should be so. Spicy talks and amusing chatters are the privileges of the lesser men and should not be snatched away from them. The teetotaller who has acquired an unnatural mastery over his tongue as far as relishing is concerned can certainly further its aridity so as to pronounce only a dry set of words that are devoid of any human emotions. I had the misfortune to watch a man who belonged to this noble type and had the good fortune not to have his acquaintance. It

was a delight to watch his clock-wise regularity. At the stroke of two, would he keep down his pen and from his drawer would slowly bring forth a green plantain. Carefully would he roll out its outer skin and with measured munches would he finish it off ! He would keep his mouth securely shut in the process of actual eating and would open it just enough to allow the plantain in. This scientific consumption of an ordinary fruit has kept his health intact, as he says, and I believe in him. If he tells me that a regular skinning of the plantain has kept his fingers going on account of the exercise the process yields, I would believe in him readily. He is not a man, he is a machine and I am afraid he must be a horrible man for his family to cope up with. Who else would be able to maintain such a mechanical rhythm of all daily activities as that wonderful man manages to keep ? I believe a very few. If I would have been his wife, I would have drowned myself in the sea !

I smoke very rarely. I smoke if someone is good enough to offer me a cigarette. Never do I spend for it. Not that I am miserly, but that I don't like to purchase that pleasure. When I am greatly perturbed, I may have one and may try to smoke away my worries. The curling smoke may lift up many a trouble or may make them appear comparatively light. For me the cigar has only a limited fascination and my lungs do not pine for their smoky warmth. I can tolerate the company of a

chain smoker and can enjoy his talk through the bluish curling curtain. I may even waste a few of them without quite enjoying them. I cannot distinguish between the different qualities of tobacco and my person inhales every type with Nature's impartiality. A cigarette is a cigarette and nothing more and should be smoked away without any ado. That's what I do. Now I feel it is such a good thing that I have not developed that tobacco-fobia or the fastidiousness for a particular brand. I am using the cigar and that too rarely, only as a sort of finishing touch to a cup of tea or as a full-stop to a heavy conversation. I fear that an excessive indulgence in this smoke recreation might shatter the network of my sensitive nerves and I may, as a consequence lose their receptive faculties or responsive vibrations. Apprehending this 'nervous' catastrophe have I managed to keep those Lilliputian Angels at an arm's length !

I think that the average man has an immense fascination for liquor because he has heard too much about it from his infancy and heard all adversely. This has infused in him such a consuming sense of curiosity that he pines to have a peg and taste what it is all like. He cannot imagine that such an innocently good-looking, tempting beverage has a terrific force in its pinky modesty and little does he know that a drunkard of the master-type would rather barter a glass-full of his own blood to a glass-full of alcohol than go without

it and thus waste his day! All this is all right. But one does feel occasionally to have a little peg and go in a sweet stupor of narcotic forgetfulness. A few ounces of good wine has an amazing capacity for firing anybody with the reckless spirit of "Let the world go to hell" and it is this marvellous capacity to rouse the latent, desperate instincts in a man that triumphs over the puny efforts of a normal fellow to get rid of it for good and all. In spite of all the horrors and miseries that have been bottled up in a bottle of wine, one, off and on does feel like gathering a few friends and imbibing sip by sip a good pint of brandy or two and let himself go in a world where all is leisure and fun. This fascinating transformation and that beautiful escape is that what tempts the world. The teetotaller would even shun the exotic odour emanating from a glass and would return politely all cigarettes and the little peg. It is good that he does. We all do need such ideals before us so that quite involuntarily they act as a sort of check on our spoiling instincts. I respect the teetotaller and I do it more of awe than of real appreciation. My respect about him is not without a sense of pity about him that secretly chirps in my heart that the young disciplinarian before me may be enjoying the higher pleasure of having kept his tongue under the thumb of self-control but he is missing a lot of cheap pleasure that a commoner like me wouldn't afford to miss. I cannot boast of such a mastery

over my mind and I do not regret at that. Therefore, I defy my teetotallarian instincts by occasional orgies but take care that they keep me within my limits.

* *
*

43

THE KIDDIES

IT may be because I was the last of my father's little mistakes and had, as a result no occasion to fondle a younger brother or sister that I have developed such a peculiar fascination and love for kiddies. They are the little embodiments of innocence and joy, laughter and mirth, delicacy and blissful ignorance. I like them all because I feel like being one of them. I would like to be innocent to the extent of not being called ignorant, and would be joyful so as not be termed, foolish. Laughter and mirth would I share as much as I could. The child appears to me to be a perfect model of what we should be like, or rather what I would like to be. My task of becoming so is rendered extremely difficult because I am utterly incapable of getting rid of too many unpleasant things. I cannot snatch his prerogative of sleeping peacefully under the warm shadow of a vigilant mother as much as it wishes. On the contrary, sound sleep is getting a matter of diminishing utility as I grow up in age. I remember

those glorious days when like, a log I slept and next morning did I wake up when some one jerked me up and pulled me out literally from my bed. Those days are gone. Now I pull others out of their beds. The refreshing sense one experiences after a heavy nap need hardly be described. One of the few precious items that we all have to forfeit as we ripen is that we have to lose our natural privilege of a deep slumber. Mental worries and financial troubles act in too many cases as "eye-openers". My general inference is that more the person in age, the less his sleep.

This is not all. I work and they play. I sleep of fatigue while they sleep because they are too tired to play. My normal head is a whirring receptacle of stupid worries and consuming sorrows, while theirs are but fleshy red balloons, that conjure up many a sweet dream of balls and dolls and all the requisites of a godly innocent world. While I roll up here and there wondering how I would pull out the last week of the month with a solitary rupee in my coat-pocket their tiny hands and feet are kicking out a fountain of joy. While I give my little support to maintain the show of "civilization", they bother about better things and play the time out. I run like a madman as I see the usual approaching train while leisurely do they shamble along to schools, looking here and looking there, even looking amusingly at the mad scramble of men running breathlessly for trains !

I sometimes feel that children of this generation are generally much smarter than what their parents were. They have developed a keener sense of understanding and a better faculty for repartee. I am short to twenty-five by about five months and distinctly remember my childhood. I remember that we then were a set of young fools munching all day long like a goat and then snoring off as a natural effect. Our mothers were a relentless species of strict females and rammed down our throats bottles of milk and spoons of medicines. I remember, I used to kick up a hell, kick off the bottle of milk and hurl away that spoon of medicine when I was really ill, though that was fortunately rare.

I had developed immensely an abdominal sense and was almost a glutton. Let alone repartee, but I wouldn't even blurt out my name, should some persevering visitor bothered about it, if only to flatter my father. I am seeing something different in the young buds of to-day. The petals of their intelligence and understanding, these days are opening up prematurely and their tiny tongues are working eloquently many a stiff talk that is too much for their age. I have a feeling that children of to-day are, as a rule, precocious and baffle clean their parents by too many sharp questions and too many intriguing queries. When my sister's little darling asked me all of a sudden, as to why the aeroplane flies, I confess that I faltered so miserably

that I deftly changed the topic to his cricket, his matches and his scores! Poor chap! He forgot all about his aeroplane and out came all the results of the cricket matches and his score in each one of them. Had I not cruised the confusing query clean, my aeroplane of ignorance would certainly have made a forced landing and would have crashed on the rocks of confusion. When I was a baby, I have seen aeroplanes too but didn't bother the elders and put them in confusion but went on merrily with my chocolate. The colts of to-day rather would throw away their chocolate than tolerate an evasive answer. Fortunately I am not as yet a father, but as a precautionary measure am learning the answers for odd questions with which my son and daughter would attempt to baffle me. The child of to-day is not an innocent lump of live flesh it once was but has become a searching critic. He no doubt would eat and enjoy the chocolate but while doing so wouldn't look vacantly at the sky or shout at the passing vehicles as I did but would ask its little mind what that little thing he is chewing is made of or why the motor runs so fast and the cart doesn't! That is the modern child of the modern age. Machines have entered into his juvenile brain and his frail physique is harbouring an increasingly active brain. His childish ignorance is giving place to a mechanical bend and his puerile impetuosity is getting bottled up in a self-inflicted, pre-mature

Little Shabbat, returning from school, would pull out long coat
and say, "I am cold." (P. 190)



self-centred. From his infancy can he distinguish between a silver coin and a nickel one and know their value better. He is not so very afraid of his father as we were and wouldn't hesitate to hit back in an incident like. Above all, he has developed such a tremendous sex-consciousness that I am particularly amazed at that. He is getting a natural affinity for steel and iron and would surely fit himself in a changing world, getting increasingly mechanized in action and thought. His crying has given place to subtler ruses of deception and he has learned to manage things alone. His increasingly diminishing size is increasing his thinking propensities and I picture him as a man, who would be scientifically cold, mechanically calculating and perversely inhuman in ways and means. This might be an exaggerated apprehension but if it materializes, I would pity the world.



44

THE FAIR SEX

THE fair sex around us is a silver lining to what would otherwise have been a dark cloud of an arid masculine existence. It is the rein to our galloping horse of desperate recklessness and manly dare-devilry. It is the origin, the beauty and the

shelter of our lives. I have such a tremendous attraction for the fair-sex, diffused as it is with a maternal instinct that I am not tired of ladie's company, even for a considerable time and can sustain its soft onslaught without any suggestion of grumbling. To me the ladies are a fairly tolerable race because they demand less of my intrinsic merit and more of my crude, natural self. I feel quite at ease with them as I have not to be on my guard with regard to what I say. Cheap humour and light talk can keep them laughing for any length of time and I don't consider this as a very difficult task. I have observed that many men simply can't get on with women because they are quite incapable of seeing with any of them eye to eye or are incapable of forgetting their sex-consciousness. The ladies are marvellously adept in picking out the vile villain or the faltering idiot and develop naturally an instinctive nausea for them. I have not come across a single lady who has called me bad names-including my wife! I feel this achievement none too small as you should remember that this species has a better vocabulary for abusing than extolling.

The beauty of the fair-sex consists in the fact that it is altogether a complex and intricate affair. I have observed a boy and girl of ten and while the boy may just be a bundle of stupidity, his little mate is usually a little parcel of wile, craft and depth. This is so, for the obvious reason that

a man and a woman are so fundamentally different from one another that I think it is an awkward proposition to compare them in any respect. The mental fabric of a woman is much more different than the mere physical difference between a man and a woman. I am prone to believe that a man's mind is more or less the mind of an old child, straight and straightforward. The woman's is as sensitive and touchy as the photographic plate and shall not miss the slightest hint of an offensive remark or taunt. Women have one more important advantage to their credit. While most of them show to the world, an almost innocent face, there works behind it such a network of sentimental complications that the dull man would get an adequate idea of its complexity only should he change his sex! Not with women alone but the highly interesting point about the human face is that while it looke so godly innocent and so divine, it is always far from that; whereas the beasts may look too beastly and repulsive but with all that, may be harbouring a benevolent heart and an altruistic spirit. Their apparent cruelty might be a matter of natural adjustment or a necessity for survival. But the human being who thinks that he is above all that, manages to wear a hypocritical expression and speech and deludes all and sundry. Nothing is more intriguing than the face of a woman and nothing so fascinating if it is beautiful. A beautiful face has usually a stupid and haughty

owner and it is rare to find an alluring face that radiates pure intelligence. Intelligence has a better fascination for common faces and uncommon ugliness and seeks refuge in them as if to emphasize its resplendence against the back-ground of a coarser face or a darkish appearance. This general severance of intellect with beautiful ladies has yielded a good result. Those charming creatures fall an easy victim to a man's persuasions or wooings and in that process delight him better because they fight the uneven battle of tongue with a poor equipment of reason. Another good benefit is that the seductive type is usually so very haughty and arrogant that their pride and ego pulls them down and brings them down to their proper levels. This makes many a home happy !

But with all that I feel that the particular weaknesses of women are so cunningly formulated by Nature that they are the exact requisites for creating trouble. Jealousy for example. This quaint characteristic has shattered many a man. How often do we hear of some woman committing, in fit, a suicide, suspecting that her husband is having an affair with some other woman, probably a nurse or a teacher or that economically independent type, that doesn't marry in time and then interferes with somebody's husband and then makes a mess of his home ? Malice, petty-mindedness, blissful stupidity and a general ignorance are all counterbalanced by singular devotion, immense

forbearance, colossal sacrifice and a wonderful fortitude. It is because the woman is such a marvellous combination of the qualities of the bad angel and the good one that this life has become tolerable and men haven't turned into loafers. It is because they appreciate sincerely, our smallest achievements that we think that we have done a little something. It is because they can be less mindful of wealth, that we can manage to keep them contented with a little personal sacrifice here and there. It is because they are too tolerant that we become intolerant. It is because they have a small mind that glorifies our little, puny selves that we get a sort of individuality, which otherwise we wouldn't have got. It is because they have almost a spiritual courage latent in them that we count upon its sudden backing and go headlong into a world with a silent assurance. Say what you will Sir ! But woman beats the man in many respects. At least I think she does. Many a stiff-necked man would, by this time be shambling along, hanging down his head in shame, but for the celestial verbal thrashing of a spirited mother or a dutiful wife or a wise daughter. If some men think that women are a foolish lot, I would only say that they haven't as yet understood their ways and their nature. Nature has made them joint receptacles of joy, sorrow, sacrifice and courage. It is because they cannot all respond to all those divergent emotions equally superbly that we find

some sort of ambiguity in their persons. All of them may not achieve the excellence of all these qualities but I honestly believe that almost all of them have all the basic requirements of all the good qualities that make a real woman and they spring forth when occasions demand. I have seen many a woman unperturbed in a situation that would have crushed the stiff heart of many a man. I have seen them weathering many a terrific storm of adverse circumstances with a faint, reckless smile that defied all their fury. How many posthumous babies have thrived and made a name in this world, the child having as his companion, teacher, mother and father none but a frail creature in the person of its mother? How many orphans have given happiness and shelter to many an old woman, who had, in their youth, given a terrific struggle? Yes! The internal beauty of a woman is far more alluring than her external one. Her sacrifice is much greater than the burden of delivery. Her courage is colder than what one may conceive and her fortitude has only to be tested by poverty. I cannot imagine what a horrible place this world would have been without those earthly fairies and though some of them might be altogether naughty, I can understand that. I wouldn't have thought of returning home hurriedly in the evening and I am sure most of you would have thought alike as well. The woman is the living embodiment of what the man has, together with what he hasn't. And

this, I believe, has kept the world alive!

* *
**

45

KNOW THEM ALL

ALL of my nears and dears consider me as an extremely eccentric fellow and shower on me, desirable and undesirable compliments. I am sure, their remarks are inspired by deep affection and an intense desire to see me well-set here. As I am, they feel that I am quite incapable of understanding the ways of the world and therefore might land myself in some serious trouble at any moment. They consider me simple to the point of being a simpleton and pity my straight thinking and straighter ways. They apprehend that like this I simply wouldn't be able to get on and that some friendly crook might lure me into signing as a surety for him or I may advance a big loan to anyone, taking the loan myself to help him out of his difficulty. When I look at myself from their searching point of view, I know that many of their apprehensions are not without just reasons. In spite of elderly advice, I have been a surety too often and have borrowed a loan on many an occasion to help the other fellow

the moral grief, as I had dishonoured the elders by rejecting their advice, I was at the same time, indulging in the boundless joy of materialistic philanthropy. When my face had fallen a bit, while actually receiving the borrowed money, that of my friend had flushed with gratitude and relief. If I could get so heavy a compound interest in the form of a friend's gratitude and relief, I don't think I would hesitate to take advances of petty sums in my name and see the needy through. But my well-wishers were not altogether wrong.

In the small hours of one fine morning a man came to see me, and I was surprised to see him. I never knew him well but often had I seen him patiently waiting, as I did, for the same morning train. Sometimes it was a smile, or a "Good morning" or a "How are you!" That's all that passed between him and me. He always dressed nicely and I was sure he was a man who was quite well off both at home and in his office. That morning his fine dress had, as usual, adorned him but his face had sunken down and darkish shadows hovered over that usually bright person. I was glad to see him however, bade him sit, asked for a couple of cups of tea and talked as nicely as I could. I knew there was something unusually wrong with that man or else his well-clad person wouldn't have dreamt of stooping so low as to approach my careless, ill-clad self. I knew well that he would explain his surprise arrival of his own accord and therefore I kept on

talking about weather, prices of cloth, ready made suits and some such things that do not even lightly touch the monetary difficulties. To ginger him up I told him all about the local cricket, the good cinema shows and such fine things as manage to maintain our moods and balance. As last he could stand it no longer. Out came his apologetic request. "Well! gentleman," said he colouring a bit, "I am in a serious difficulty. I want a loan, a loan of sixty chips only. My wife would deliver within a week and mature babies won't rest idly in mother's wombs for the next first. I want your help, your money, badly. I even don't know you well; but I am sure you wouldn't disappoint me. Well! In the name of the unfortunate baby, please say, yes!" I visualized at once a little reddish baby nestling with a youngish mother, blissfully happy over her little one and little knowing that the birth of her darling was secured with somebody else's borrowed money and that reflection melted me clean. Without a moment's delay, I said "Yes" and then I realized what a fool I had been! I had with me only fourteen rupees and as I pulled out the little sum, meticulously hidden in a darkish corner of a cracking cup-board, I wondered how I would fulfill my pledge. I went into the kitchen and told my wife all about it. Her maternal and preserving instinct got a rude shock. Slowly did she get up, ransacked another darkish corner where my spendthrift hand had not miracul-

ously as yet played any havoc and out of a little red silky rag, poured out the money on my eager palm. As I heard the jingling, I could almost see before my mental eyes my early visitor being gratified with gratitude. I counted the money and what a wonder! There were exactly forty six rupees. I mixed mine with them; they were now sixty! We instinctively looked at each other and tears had gathered in my eyes and hers. I am sure that those welling tears had the divine sparkle of innocence as would flash in the eyes of my visitor's baby - a flash purchased by a little loaned sum!

And here's how my elders were right. My sentimental somersaults had made me shell out my only saving. One of my friends whom I narrated this incident, moved by its tragic elements, told me, after a couple of days that the well-clad fine fellow was smoking merrily on the race-course enclosure, flashing about a little book and was expecting, not the birth of a baby with that borrowed money but was calculating and expecting the birth of a "little fortune!" Thereafter I noticed that he tried to evade me and I too didn't bother. After a couple of months I asked him quite deliberately, "How's the little one?" Flashing down a morose face in an instant, he callously replied, looking about his clothes, "The baby has already left for a world where petty people do not make much of small sums. I am sorry, I wouldn't be able to return that ill-fated sum. I have lost the baby and you, the money!"

I returned home, a bit dejected and saw my wife bursting with joy. I was perturbed at that. I told her blankly that we had lost that precious sum of sixty rupees. She was all the more delighted. I wondered what it all was. I imagined that she was the only woman in the world who would laugh so merrily even when her husband was crushed beneath, what was virtually a financial catastrophe for me. Again did she ransack that mysterious corner and thrust in my palm a little wad of notes! I was amazed. She then told me that she had won the first prize of rupees three hundred in a school-lottery. I felt instantly relieved. I thought I may have been duped by rascals and scoundrels but there is still a protecting deity hovering about me and my family. This divine assurance has infused me with a self-confidence and I am determined more to obey my inner impulses all the more, certain as I am of my good motives. That may not give me the far-sightedness of a practical materialist but I don't worry about it. I feel that the price of being too shrewd is exorbitant and hence I prefer to be simple. Sometimes my guarding matter-of-fact instinct rises as if from a long and deep slumber and tries to warn me saying, "know them all", but I am too absent-minded to exploit such internal cautions. Five fine fellows with clean apparels may yet visit me in the small hours of the morning and pretend to be the prospective fathers of five little ones and I

am almost certain that my five fingers would squeeze out of that red silky rag, that lucky hit of three hundred and turn them all away, to look out for their babies on race tracks, or wine-bars or gambling dens. Then one day they would tell me that my money is ill-fated, the unborn children have all expired and so has the money. Such incidents then fill me with dismay and shame and my guarding instinct, rousing from its lethargic slumber again yawns out, "Know them all"!

* *
*

46

THE CLOSING DRAMA

AS for me, I have just started my life. It is for me a matter of catching trains, punctual arrivals and unpunctual departures, tired eye-lids, heavy work and little emoluments. It is almost a mechanized process of a number of mechanical duties. The life around me sways to and fro with greater vigour and finer tempo. I sometimes feel like accelerating my own speed but in my sporadic attempts, fail miserably. Life then goes on as usual for me and my efforts cause not even as much of a ripple in its tide. Then I work when I have to, spend the money, when I really don't wish it and when there is nothing to spend and none to talk

with, I write! When I consider that I have to pass many an eventless year, exactly like a few I have spent, I shudder. Human life has many sides but I haven't any. What a misfortune! I can't even whistle nicely. It is a hiss with a likeness to some harsh note. I like the universe and I like this life too but I would like to pass a creative one. I say, I would like to because I have not been able to, at least till now. Singers would sing, painters would paint, sculptors would carve and actors would act but a commoner would always watch and waste himself away. If I have degenerated so miserably as to love monotony let me tell you that I have affected this unnatural conversion as a suitable requisite for making myself happy here. This ultimate submission to fate is an utter testimony of my helplessness and is an emphasize that I cannot wriggle myself out of all that huge rotting dust bin, the world has become.

The future holds an unknown dread and though my optimism squeezes it, yet in my pensive moods I wonder what life holds for me. When I cannot visualize anything better than catching trains and tired homeward returns and blinking eye-lids and heavier work and an almost stable remuneration, I feel that it would be a terrible ordeal that I have to go through. It is quite easy to write about kiddies but it is such a hell of a task to rear them, fondle them and see them set up. Especially for a person like me who is scarcely

capable of looking independently after himself, the onus of maintaining all alone my own family, frightens me a bit. Yes ! Yes ! Kiddies look so sweet when they are somebody else's and their crying and shouting is but a delightful chirping when that vocal pandemonium goes on in our neighbours' room ! I do not quite know what I would do should my child get up in the dead of night and knock me out of my slumber. I have decided to thrust it, lightly though, towards his or her mother, roll to the other side and snore off again. I am sure the mother would be too glad to have that sweet burden all to herself and this makes me hopeful of my sleep. A bachelor and a young married man without a child are creatures that live in a dreamy, idealistic world and only the hard reality brings them to proper senses and understanding. Who knows ? I may as well change my ideas and speak less highly of kiddies and their mothers. I may not like to enjoy an undisturbed sleep and would like to keep awake when the baby is awake and would even resent should its mother ask it from me. That I say, is a paternal possibility and cannot altogether be left out of this circumspect consideration. The books do not teach one how to entertain a little ball of live flesh and my convenient theories and other escapes wouldn't quite work. But I am doing too much of too "little"! Life is not a matter of rearing up crying, sickly babies alone. It is some-

thing else. What that "something" is, I do not quite know. I am afraid I may not know it till my end. The beauty of the universe is enhanced by its incomprehensible mysticism and the limited gamut of human intelligence. Every dying generation leaves its research to posterity and the posterity in turn leaves it to the next generation, the research remaining an advanced muddle that arrives at no conclusions and proclaims its helplessness. Medical science has been but wondering at the marvel of our birth and probing vainly into the mystery of Death long enough and I am sure would do so for generations to come. Should some scientist by some miracle hit upon the formula to produce animation in inanimate beings, Nature then would bow in humiliation to that wonder-man and there would be no such thing as closing drama. Life then would be an endless perpetuation of a horrible existence and I would rather die than see that wonder-man as a successful inventor, deriding Death !

When a man dies when he is ripe, his mature extinction acquires a peculiar charm. I would like to expire with that peculiar charm too. The closing chapters of my life should be far from exciting as I would, by then, be having enough of it. A silvery head sparsely covered should adorn my top. A not too bent form should occupy a chair, with a book in a hand and a grand-son in the lap.. I would then read a lot on physical de-

velopment and breathing exercises and try to straighten my raped back. The morning would find me an early bird and I would flutter round about my home. I would laugh then as much as I do now, the only difference would be my laughter then would sound hollow and my ribs may not quite stand its boisterous strain. I am afraid I may change many of my ideas and should I improve my mental stock, it would be an asset in my old age. A stick would I purchase with a glittering handle and merrily would I whirl it round and round and walk in the closing hours of the day towards the beach and gaze at the sea till my drooping eyelids could withstand that motionless composure. I would, when in an introspective mood make a survey of my wasted life and would thrust on the unattentive young sons, loads of bitter experiences. My sons, I feel, would forget all that I have uttered, commit again the same blunders with paternal consistency and advise my unattentive grand-sons in my own style. Sons and daughters are our live perpetuations and I would sit in a spacious chair and watch how much they resemble me and how much they don't. New generations bring new traits and I would keenly await and watch what those new traits would be. My fairly thoughtful person then would watch the new colts with a sort of circumspection, as my father did when I was a baby and I am sure I would say as serenely as he does now, that "The world is going to dogs!"

Then my family would be a large affair, full of young people and I would be a respectable member therein by virtue of my age, if not by any other virtue! My grand-sons would peer curiously in my face and my failing eyesight might struggle to watch all their pranks. On hot afternoons would I then stretch myself in an armchair and stir restlessly as the kiddies are raising too much of a Hell around and would then go off to sleep with the spectacles on my forehead and the book on health about me. My tired limbs would then acquire the habit of stealing such naps and when awake I would cough and be ill intermittently and almost would be a nuisance in my home. The rooms around would be full of laughter but I alone would be a sort of invalid. That, I believe, would be the beginning of the closing drama!

* * *

47

LAST VISIONS

MY gloomy thoughts in the preceding chapter have compelled me to visualize the last visions. I feel that a man considerably changes his opinions and theories. My views at the fag end of my inglorious existence may not be either as idealistic or dreamy as may now flash out in my youthful exuberance. I cannot expect that I would see all my expectations

fulfilled or my ambitions gratified. Having restricted the expanse of my imaginary vision, I cannot believe that with maturer years it might expand to disproportionate limits and see me baffled as a consequence. I cannot compress the beauty of the universe and the forces of life in its compact square. I would only attempt to squeeze out accommodation for myself and my family in happier circumstances. I have a clear idea about my capacities and worth and have wisely restrained from setting up ideals. As such, I wouldn't create trouble for myself by seeing them left to themselves. I hope to maintain my simpler habits to my end so that I can be of increasing help to my growing family. I would like to see my sons well-set just as any father would, but would take care to marry my daughters in time to worthy gentlemen. They may be financially unsound and practically none too well off but I would see that they are worthy of being called gentlemen, with a keen sense of self-respect and honour. One shouldn't, I feel, talk too confidently about one's sons. The best of fathers, have dashed down many a paternal hope on their truant, wayward sons. I have seen a tee-totaler having as his son a reputed drunkard, an educationalist having a first rate vagabond in his off-spring to worry about and such series of paternal paradoxes that frighten my prophetic instincts. If my sons do nothing dishonourable, I would be happy. If they pass a mere common-

place existence, I would be happier. But should one or all of them assert themselves and acquire a distinct individuality and individual creations in any sphere, I would be the happiest father. I may look upon my sons as my personal residue and may expect them to complete what I have failed to achieve. I desire to be a grand old man and wouldn't mind being even a centenarian if my sons and daughters turn out all right. I then would sit in the verandah in the company of my aged partner, under the pale moon and would look around and try to hear the distant voices of my sons and their wives. We then would talk on many a thrilling episode from our own lives and while my first son might be madly fondling his first son and showing him the moon yonder, I would recall my youthful days and tell my wife how I did the same, a couple of decades ago. She then would remember and clearly see her youthful face before her mental eyes and a tragic sense of having become too old would oppress us a bit. The air around would be refreshingly cool and I would look up. What is life? An honourable retirement in a city office? No! The grand retirement of a grand-father who has seen and satisfied himself that all around is affluence and charm; the soft departure of a contented fellow in the small hours of the dawn. We would talk a lot on many old reminiscences and remember our youthful companions in turn. Many of them would be

dead, many of them in oblivion. I would suddenly recollect their faces. Then we would talk on our different neighbours, how some of them were bad; though they appeared so good and how some of them were so good though they appeared so bad. Our talk would stretch far in the night and the moon now would not be so pale and would be almost over our heads. I would then remember my friends, those friends with some of whom I quarreled, some of whom have ceased to exist and some, with whom I rolled in the sands on the beach, smoked there many a cigarette, and enjoyed many a night. One of my dutiful sons would slowly come out with his charming wife and we would now there be four. I would suggest tactfully to have a cup of tea and my diligent daughter-in-law would at once run to the kitchen and return after some time with four cups of tea. I would enquire whether my grand-son had slept peacefully and slowly exhaust the cup with little sips. I would then catch the wrinkled wrist of my wife and asking the two to enjoy the beauty of the night, would slowly return to my room. As I would gargle and throw the water out of my bed-room window, I would steal a glance at the young couple in the verandah and smile a smile that would say, "I have seen it all, sonny". Then would I lie down. My limbs have now forgotten to catch punctual trains and in fact, I am taking a latitude with time. The workshops pound as relentlessly and factory-workers hurry still as usual.

The mills are disgorging million yards of cloth and the poor are still half-clad. Granaries are oversfull but people still die of starvation. The foreman is as haughty as he was and has, in all probability, more mechanical devices for extorting labour. The industrial advancement has become a craze and man has almost become a machine. Nature is yet fighting magnificently to maintain her superiority and the puny scientist has still closetted himself in that stupefying laboratory, struggling with superhuman efforts to solve the mystery of birth and death.

I would walk leisurely along the little garden around my humble abode, the garden that I have created out of mere nothing, with the help of my little grand-sons and grand-daughters. I would resent if the boys snatch away any flowers but I wou'dn't mind if the girls do. I would like the boys to try to lift heavy stones and erect a dam for our garden. I would supervise loosely in the house and my sons would respect my presence. My daughters would have borne good children and the sons-in-law would be prospering. I could observe that my aged partner was as much delighted when our daughter got a female as I was when our son got a male. The perpetuation of one's sex no doubt yields a secret joy!

My last visions may be altogether different. Who can say? I might be an eccentric, peevish, old bandicoot. But that is a rare possibility. I

wouldn't miss my basic rudiments that give me a dreamy flair and that is why I hope to be a good, old man. I would gather older friends and talk of life as sportively as I do now. Little kiddies, returning from school, would pull our long coats from behind and I wouldn't mind that. My sinking health and cooling blood would render me, I hope, a warmer heart and happily would I live and merrily would I laugh. If after such a happy spell, Death should snipe me clean from this earth, what on earth is one to grumble about? The small hours of dawn, I repeat, would see me frozen cold and the next morning the world would go on as ever. Workers would hurry to their work-shops and gents to their offices and shops. All else would be the same. The kiddies would destroy the garden and the veranadah chair would have no introspective occupant. My spirit shall have flown in a mystic vale of a mysterious world and there would I repose once for all where there are no offices, no factories, no work-shops and no scientists. The magnificence of life would have I seen, its beauty and splendour would have I enjoyed and its glory would have I sung in my own humble way as a commoner. Well satisfied and little disillusioned would I then leave from here. A blissful, contented, enigmatic smile would adorn my corpse and it would suggest that I have understood a little of life and have enjoyed thoroughly my last visions!

**

48

THE CURTAIN RINGS DOWN !

THE curtain is ringing down on this book. I have tried your patience enough for long. I have said all that I could say for the present. Life itself is such a marvellous paradox and an extremely intricate affair that my normal self hasn't been lucky to probe even into its superficial depths, let alone real. I am not a thinker or a philosopher. As such I cannot pretend to indulge in thinking nor to preach philosophy. I know neither. I have only set out the incoherent reactions of a common person as they occurred to me. This reactionary combination may not be quite respectful of conventions and technical subtleties; but I for myself profess that they have the ring of sincerity and reality. My language may be poor and my thoughts poorer but I have said all that I had to say in an inspired emotional flush. All these ramblings were racing through my person at different times and on different occasions and I have only tried to weave them all into a solid chain.

This is the last chapter of this book and I am determined to celebrate its completion. I am of course, celebrating it in my own way. I have brought half a dozen nice eggs and I am going to prepare good omelettes myself and celebrate the occasion with two cups of tea, a good number of

loaves and plenty of butter and of course, the omelettes. I am actually dashing out these lines faster as the unborn chickens in the kitchen are really attracting me too strongly to idle with my pen. I have told my wife to cut the onions in little bits and I am sure she would do it without scratching her fingers. I am certain that I would scratch mine if I meddle with that cantankerous Mr. Onion. I have told her definitely not to touch the eggs. I would like to enjoy the pleasure of breaking them one by one and pouring out their limpid lives in a small receptacle. I wouldn't mind sacrificing six innocent chickens for a temporary gratification of my abdominal craving.

I am writing at a furious speed now. I am feeling hungry too. I am also feeling as if a burden has been lifted from my head as this last chapter is filling itself up. All around is quiet. My wife has opened a slaughter house for the onions and I think she is feeling hungry too. The six whitish things, looking like ping-pong balls, float before my eyes and disappear. My neighbours' kiddies have just tripped in. They are smart enough to know that some brisk preparations that have much to do with munching are afoot and now they wouldn't leave us both to ourselves. I don't mind them at all, nor would my wife, and we all together would enjoy better.

"Yes! Yes! I am coming! Don't you spoil

the eggs"! I am shouting to keep her away from those little things. Probably she wants to have the fun of breaking them, all to herself.

"Mind the onions and chillies and all that", I say a little later as she hovers about me a little impatiently.

"I am coming! Wait for five minutes"? I shout out, all impatience myself.

The children look longingly at my composed posture and realise by now that the issue hangs over my arrival. The bold one in them slyly smiles and tries to seduce me towards the kitchen but I am adamant and simply ignore them all.

"Aren't you coming"? said she, fluttering about me. .

"Yes! Yes! Soon! Wait for a couple of minutes!"

I say all that because I never trust my wife with eggs. All housewives have a knack of spoiling omelettes. They fry it too much on one side, and keep it quite raw on the other. I prepare them quite nicely, I think.

And now I would end this bother for a more delicious occupation. You would please excuse me gentle reader! My wife and my neighbour's kiddies and the unborn chickens are all waiting for me long enough. Well, then, Sir! Good-bye everybody!

"And now for the omelettes!"

Thus I live! .